

## Scenic and adventure drive to Horton Plains from Kalupahana

**Difficulty:** Tough mountainous jeep track with hair-pin bends

**You need:** A serious four-wheel drive and an experienced driver behind the wheel

**We drove:** A Toyota Land cruiser BJ 43 & a Toyota Hilux LN106

**Trail Head:** Kalupahana on Colombo – Badulla highway

**Nearest Town:** Kalupahana

**Nearest City:** Balangoda

**Access to Trail head:** from A4 highway (Colombo – Badulla)

**Trail End:** Horton Plains National Park visitor centre

**Total Length:** 23.5 km

**Elevation Gain:** 1291m (Elevation at Trail Head: 846m | Elevation at Trail End: 2137m)

**Approximate time:** 3 - 5 hours

**Driving Season:** Best: January to March (Possible: July to August | Avoid: Monsoon Months)

**Permit Required:** YES (Only if you plan to enter the Horton Plains National Park). Alternatively you can choose to go to Ohiya and back to civilization from there without entering the park.

This unique track will give you an opportunity to enjoy some of the best hill country landscapes of Sri Lanka and push you and your vehicle to the limits as you pass hair pin bends exceeding 15 degrees gradient. One section of the trail is so difficult to pass, so that it is popularly known as the "Devils staircase". You will also be able to see the highest waterfall in Sri Lanka, the "Bambarakanda falls".

**0 to 5km:** To enter the trail take left turn from Colombo – Badulla highway at Kalupahana, between 173<sup>rd</sup> and 174<sup>th</sup> km post (**waypoint KH01**). As you drive about 200m along the narrow but paved track, you will hit a "Y" junction (**waypoint KH02**). Take the left turn from there. As you drive about 3.5 more kilometers you will reach the first attraction of the journey, Bambarakanda falls, tallest in Sri Lanka. The best observation point is at about 4.2 km from the Colombo – Badulla highway (**waypoint KH03**). Passing Bambarakanda falls, drive 800m to reach Bambarakanda rest (**waypoint KH04**).

Bambarakanda Rest is a small guest house managed by Mrs Sera Mayakaduwa. It is an ideal place for you to take a break and see around. There are many exciting nature trails in the area including the trail to the top of Bambarakanda falls and the trail to "Lanka Ella" falls, another beautiful waterfall.

**5km to 13.5 km:** This section of the trail is of medium difficulty. Occasionally you may have to engage 4WD especially if the trail is not completely dry. Make sure that your front wheel hubs are in "lock" position if they are manually operated.

Leaving Banbarakanda rest, continue uphill along the trail. Soon the trail will become an unpaved dirt road. About 1km from Bamabarakanda rest, there is a scenic outlook where you can see bambarakanda falls surrounded by the mountain range and Pines plots (**waypoint KH05**).

As you climb uphill you will be able to enjoy the breathtaking view of the vast Kalthota plains and Samanalawewa reservoir

Around 7.3km from trail head, the trail enters "Udaweriya Estate" through a narrow passage cut through the hill slope which is popularly known as "the V-cut" (**waypoint KH06**). As you drive along the track, you will cross the stream which feed Bambarakanda falls.

Around 10km from the trail head, the first set of hair pin bends should be tackled (**waypoint KH07**).

Around 11.5km from trail head, there is a "Y" junction (**way point KH08**). The sharp left, uphill track goes to an estate bungalow. Continue on the right, slightly down-hill track towards Ohiya Estate.

Around 12km from trail head you have to pass the second set of more difficult hair-pin bends known as the Devils Staircase (**waypoint KH09**). Use the lowest possible gear and drive down-hill as slow as possible.

After the devils staircase continue to climb down. At **waypoint KH 10** a smaller track merges from the right side. Continue along the main track (do not turn)

At **waypoint KH 11**, 13.5 km from the trail head, you reach an important junction where the trail divides in to two, giving you two options.

The first option is to take the left branch up-hill. This track will take you to the 26<sup>th</sup> km post of Ohiya – Pattipola road. There is approximately 3km to Ohiya-Pattipola road and the trail is extremely challenging. This is the track we chose to take and therefore the remainder of this guide will describe this trail. Unless you are driving a serious 4WD you should NOT attempt this.

*The other option, the right branch down-hill, will take you to Ohiya. Distance to Ohiya is 9km from this point. From **KH11**, you will climb down for the next 1.8 km and then will climb up for another 5.2km to reach Ohiya-Pattipola road. Out of this 5.2km, the last 2.6km is a well paved section. Up to the point of the well paved track the trail condition is similar to that from Bambarakanda fall. On Ohiya-Pattipola road you have to drive another 2km to reach the Ohiya railway station. Overall, the conditions of this trail are much better and less challenging compared to the left branch.*

**13.5km to 16.5km:** As you take the left turn up-hill, you enter the most difficult part of the trail. This part of the trail will continuously challenge you with hair-pin bends with close to 20 degrees of gradient, fair size rocks, boulders and thick mist, especially in the afternoon, which sometimes restricts visibility to merely few meters ahead.

Length of this section is approximately 3km and the condition of the trail is pretty much consistent from start to end.

The only decision point you encounter in this section is the **waypoint KH12** around 15.2km from the trail head. At this point there is a "T" junction and you should take the left turn.

This is the last section of the jeep track. At the end of the trail, you will have to take a sharp left bend and enter Ohiya-Horton Plains-Pattipola paved road at the 26<sup>th</sup> km post (**waypoint KH13**)

**16.5 km to 23.5 km:** If you plan to end your journey at the Horton plains wildlife department's visitor centre turn left as you get on to the paved road. Enjoy the breathtaking views of Horton plains for the next seven kilometers to the visitor centre (**waypoint KH14**). You will have to obtain a permit on your way there at the entrance of the protected area which is located 1.5km from the point at which you reached the Ohiya-Pattipola road (**waypoint KH13**)

*Alternatively you can take the right turn and reach Ohiya town.*

**Tips, Notes & special remarks:**

- Try to start early and complete the unpaved portion of the trail before early afternoon (at least by 2.00 p.m.)
- Make sure that your vehicle is in good mechanical condition (tires/breaks/suspension). Use low gears (and 4WD where trail is wet) and be gentle on gas pedal to avoid engine over-heating and wheel spin. Drive as slow as possible, as fast as necessary.
- If you plan to enter the national park, make sure that you are prepared to follow the rules and regulations applicable in a protected area. For an example you cannot use musical instruments or alcohol in a protected area.
- Be careful when using water from streams. Water from streams running through tea estates is NOT suitable for drinking. It will be a good idea to carry at least 1ltr of water per person.

**Waypoints**

	<b>N:</b> dd° mm.mmm'	<b>E:</b> dd° mm.mmm'	Elevation
KH01	6° 45.967'	80° 51.044'	846 m
KH02	6° 46.126'	80° 50.921'	865 m
KH03	6° 46.245'	80° 49.968'	1056 m
KH04	6° 46.364'	80° 50.112'	1142 m
KH05	6° 46.392'	80° 50.262'	1183 m
KH06	6° 46.478'	80° 49.898'	1408 m
KH07	6° 46.924'	80° 49.891'	1558 m
KH08	6° 47.325'	80° 50.050'	1745 m
KH09	6° 47.356'	80° 50.231'	1746 m
KH10	6° 47.582'	80° 50.235'	1772 m
KH11	6° 47.783'	80° 50.408'	1748 m

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KH12	6° 48.087'	80° 50.486'	1892 m
KH13	6° 48.335'	80° 50.547'	2040 m
KH14	6° 48.143'	80° 48.399'	2137 m