

THE SPELL OF FLOWER POWER

Climb up the Shirui-Kashong Hill in Manipur and see the magical Siroy lily. Bet you'll never forget it!



portunity and skip the chance of see the rare Siroy Lily in bloom.

Two places

I was told by my friends who were guiding the trek that there are only two places where the lily would flower and the Shirui hill was one of them. Moreover, this happens only once a year around the month of May-June which is exactly the time I had found myself visiting Manipur. What I also learnt was that the Shirui peak (and the lily) has different articulations, including Siroy, Shiroy, Sirohee, Shirui, the last one being the local pronunciation. A two-hour climb starting from the Shirui village, 14 km from



The climb up the hill in Siroy.

By Kanchi Kohli

There are some life experiences which give a whole different meaning to being one with nature. In many ways they continue to inspire you to be what you are, even years after those moments are lived. We might gather many more memories along the way, find several new ways of instilling confidence and even creating myriad opportunities for ourselves. But there some moments that remain as fresh as the first monsoon rains.

It is for this very reason I can never forget my trek up the Shirui-Kashong Hill in Ukhrul district in the north-eastern state of Manipur. I was not entirely confident I could make it as I had been a couch potato the last few months before I had agreed to the hike. And the 2,570-metre straight up the hill looked fairly daunting from Shirui village. But there was no way I could miss this great op-

Manipur state flower

Shirui Lily or Siroy lily, *Lilium mackliniae*, is found in the upper reaches of the Siroy hill ranges in the Ukhrul District of Manipur, India, at an elevation of 1730 m-2590 m above sea level. It is the state flower of Manipur. This shade-loving lily has pale bluish-pink petals. In the wild it flowers in the monsoon months of June and July. They are seasonal flowering plants and at their best in May and June when it blooms. The peak season of its bloom is May 15 to June 5. The height of the plant is 1-3 ft. and has 1-7 flowers per plant. (Source: Wikipedia)

Ukhrul town would take us to a different world. I was ready for the fun.

While I was not lucky enough to see many other en-

dangered bird species like the Blyth's Tragopan and Mrs Hume's Bar-backed Pheasant or Nongyin, Manipur's state bird which also inhabit the area, I huffed and puffed my way to the top of the hill to gather a glimpse of Siroy. I knew I was one of the slower ones, but then in many ways I am glad it was that way. It just meant that I could enjoy every moment of the drizzle and find my way beyond the mesmerising mist. Each time there was a breathtaking view I would just stop. Trust me, no camera can capture what the mind can and that is when nature's wonders are etched in your soul forever.

When we made it to the top of the Shirui hill it was magical. The flower habitat was strewn with either single lilies or in pairs and sometimes even in bunches of three. I missed finding five siroy lilies growing together, the rarest of rare occurrences I was told. But honestly, what I saw was spellbinding enough. With white rhododendron trees, numerous Irish wattii and a lot of other micro ground-level flora giving the lily scenic company.

Young guards

What was wonderful was that there were many young children and teenagers from the village who were there guard-

TRUST ME, NO CAMERA CAN EVER CAPTURE WHAT THE MIND CAN

ing the flower with utmost pride. No villager or visitor could pull out a single flower. The youngsters had organised themselves to make sure that the Shirui hill is conserved for a long time to come. I can understand why, because the state flower of Manipur has become extremely endangered over the years. In fact I have been reading about this much more in the last few years and wonder why visitors have not respected the habitat of this rare and beautiful flower.

My climb down the hill was much faster, far less of an 'up-hill' task. It might sound strange, but each time I think of the day of the trek, I simply cannot take the smile off my face. I guess that's what Siroy's spell is all about. I just hope the magic continues to spread for generations to come.

(This series is coordinated with Kalpvriksh.)



The rare Siroy Lily. PHOTOS BY AUTHOR.