

Maningala Nature Trail from Etanwala to Illukkumbura – Knuckles Range

Trail Difficulty: Easy | Moderate | Strenuous | Tough

Trail Head: Foot Bridge over ThelgamuOya at the boarder of Rathkinda and Etanwala villages

Nearest Town: Illukkumbura

Nearest City: Pallegama

Access to Trail head:

Route1: from Colombo via Kandy, Matale

Colombo -> Peradeniya [110km on A1] -> Katugasthota [7km on B365] -> Matale [23km on A9] -> Rattota [10km on B38] -> B38 turn-off towards Ratninda [24km on B38] -> Ratninda-Etanwala Boarder [4.5km]

Distance from Colombo is 178km

Reoute2: from Pallegama

Pallegama -> Illukkumbura [8km on B38] -> B38 turn-off towards Ratninda [4km on B38] -> Ratninda-Etanwala Boarder [4.5km]

Distance from Pallegama is 16.5km

Paved roads up to Ratninda bazaar. A Jeep track from Ratninda to the foot bridge over Telgamuoya which is slightly less than 1km. Public Transport only available up to the turn-off on B38 towards Ratninda, Pitawala.

Trail End: Forest Department Office near Thelgamu-Oya **Total Length:** 6.3km

Elevation Gain: 500m (Elevation at trail head: 621m | Elevation at highest point: 1104m)

Approximate time: 4-6 hours

Hiking Season: March through September. Best: April to July

Permit Required: No

“Maningala” in Sinhalese means the mountain of measurement (of time). Traditionally people in the area had use the shadow of this isolated, elephant shaped rock to keep track of the time of the day.

Climbing Maningala is a rewarding exercise. It lets you enjoy the true beauty of the Knuckles range. The beautiful “Thelgamu-Oya” river, paddy fields with the mountains in the backdrop at the traditional villages, the panoramic view of the Knuckles range from the top of Maningala, the unique flat area on the top of the mountain which resembles the spine of the elephant and the interesting diversity of vegetation are few highlights worth mentioning. Not to forget the colorful butterflies, wildflowers

and birds that inhabits the mountain that will come as pleasant surprises quite frequently.

0 to 2.15km: Starting from the foot bridge over Thelgamu Oya (**Waypoint: MN01**) connecting Rathninda and Etanwala villages, start walking up hills towards Etanwala village. In 300m from the river, you will find the first paddy fields of the Etanwala village (**Waypoint: MN03**). Cross the fields and reach the centre of the village where the houses are located (**Waypoint: MN04**).

As you reach the village, you have to start walking towards right hand side along the foot path through the home gardens. Soon you will feel that the trail is climbing up through the home gardens. The trail is well paved with stone steps as this is the beginning of the traditional trail which connects Etanwala village with the traditional villages Rambukoluwa and Meemure (via Walpolamulla, Kalupahana) through the Knuckles range. As you climb for about 300m along the trail, you will notice that the trail is leaving the village and moving in to the forest. You are now walking under the forest canopy. Still the trail is reasonably well paved with stone steps.

Around 1km from the trail head you will reach the burial grounds of Etanwala village which marks the village boarder with the forest (**Waypoint: MN09**). Passing this, continue to climb up along the trail. In about 500m from the burial ground you will find a narrower trail branching off towards right, climbing sharply up hills (**Waypoint: MN10**). This is the trail that goes all the way to Meemure via Walpolamulla, Dhuwili Ella water fall and Kalupahana. Don't take this right turn but continue along the main trail towards Rambukoluwa. In 100m from this point, the trail again splits in to two (**Waypoint: MN11**). This time, you have to turn left from the trail to climb Maningala. The continuation of the trail goes to the Rambukoluwa village.

As you turn left you have to tackle a some what intense short climb (about 100m), walk about 400m through thick canopy and tackle another intense climb (about 150m) to reach the flat mountain top of Maningala which resembles the spine of the elephant (**Waypoint: MN15**).

2.15km to 4km: As you reach the flat, narrow and long mountain top (**Waypoint: MN15**), you will be amazed by the view on both sides. On the right hand side you can see the heart of Knuckles mountains with Kalupahana, Dhuwili Ella falls, Lakegala etc. On your left hand side you can see Reverstan peak and the mountain range.

From here the trail moves biased to the left hand side edge of the plateau. As you walk about 200m from **MN15**, the trail reaches the left hand edge of the plateau where you can look straight down to see the beautiful aerial view of the Etanwala village (**Waypoint: MN17**). From this point continue to walk along the trail which is now pretty much flat. There is no forest cover and the vegetation mainly consists of grass and scrubs. It can get quite windy as well. You will occasionally encounter mild ascends and descends but they are hardly of any noticeable intensity. About 1.3km from the point where you first reached the plateau (**MN15**), the trail moves in to a thick forest (**Waypoint: MN22**).

After walking about 200m under the canopy, vegetation will again change to more scrub like formation and you will also notice that the ascend is intensifying

(Waypoint: MN23). Now you are at the neck of the elephant. What is left is the final climb up to the top of the head!

The final 300m climb to the summit from this point goes through brief sections of thick canopy and scrubs until you reach a scenic outlook providing the panoramic view of Knuckles **(Waypoint: MN26)**. From there its just 50m walk up to the summit **(Waypoint: MN27)**.

4km to 6.3km: As you cross over the summit **(Waypoint: MN27)** start your walk downhill biased towards your left hand side. As you move away from the summit, the trail moves in to the forest and start a steep descend. As you walk about 200m, descend will become steeper through the forest **(Waypoint: MN28)**. Soon the trail will come out of the thick forest and enters a scrub area, still continuing its steep descend. Another 200m walk through the scrubs, you reach another scenic outlook **(Waypoint: MN30)**. This point provides the panoramic view of another side of the Knuckles range. You can see the Pitawala plains, the Miniworld's end drop, Illukkumbura village and the Karagathenna radio transmission station. You will not be able to see the Reverstan peak as you have now crossed over to the other side of Maningala.

Passing **MN30** continue to climb down along the trail (steep!). In about 150m, you will reach a brief flat section and will notices that descend have become some what moderate **(Waypoint: MN31)**. 100m more through the scrubs, the trail will move in to the forest **(Waypoint: MN32)** and come out of that back to the scrubs to reach another scenic outlook **(Waypoint: MN33)**, now you are about 300m from the scenic outlook at MN30.

Passing the scenic outlook at **MN33**, the trail will again enter the forest. A steep descend will follow and will ease off to a moderate descend over about 100m. After about 150m more of continuous moderate descend, the trail will climb down with much less intensity with intermittent flat section for another 300m and will come out of the canopy again to a scrub land **(Waypoint: MN36)**.

Next 300m of the trail predominantly goes through scrubs with mild to moderate descend. Then it will move in to a thick forest again with the trail transforming itself to a rough, moderate descend over irregular track with boulders **(Waypoint: MN38)**.

As you walk through the forest, the descend will intensify and the trail will start to become more challenging with rocks and boulders. 200m from **MN38**, you will again come out of the canopy **(Waypoint: MN40)**. The intense descend will continue through the scrubs. This section in fact is the steepest descend you encounter during this hike. Make sure that you don't attempt to rush through this section. It is quite dangerous.

Climbing down about 150m through the scrub, the trail will again move in to the forest **(Waypoint: MN41)**. Descend is still extremely steep. In 100m more through the forest, descend will ease off **(Waypoint: MN42)**.

The last stretch from MN42 is an easy walk through the forest. You will reach the Illukkumbura forest department office in the banks of Thelgamu Oya in 250m **(Waypoint: MN44)**

Tips, Notes & special remarks:

- At least 1 liter of water per person should be carried along with you. After you pass the Etanwala village at the very beginning of the trail, there are no water sources until you reach the Thelgamu Oya at Illukkumbura. The trail through out is quite dry.
- It is not advisable to attempt this trail starting from Illukkumbura to end at Etanwala. The illukkumbura side of Maningala is extremely steep and climbing up along that will be strenuous. Therefore always start from Etanwala and finish at Illukkumbura
- Hard winds can be experienced as you reach the top of Maningala, specially during July/August/September.

Way Points

| | N: dd° mm.mmm' | E: dd° mm.mmm' | Elevation |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| MN01 (Foot Bridge – Thelgamu Oya) | 7° 31.028' | 80° 45.354' | 621 m |
| MN02 | 7° 30.990' | 80° 45.383' | 597 m |
| MN03 | 7° 30.935' | 80° 45.414' | 661 m |
| MN04 (Etanwala) | 7° 30.909' | 80° 45.490' | 670 m |
| MN05 | 7° 30.867' | 80° 45.490' | 668 m |
| MN06 | 7° 30.812' | 80° 45.483' | 698 m |
| MN07 | 7° 30.788' | 80° 45.525' | 727 m |
| MN08 | 7° 30.782' | 80° 45.556' | 739 m |
| MN09 | 7° 30.756' | 80° 45.603' | 744 m |
| MN10 (branch off to Walpolamulla) | 7° 30.606' | 80° 45.767' | 811 m |
| MN11 (branch off to Rambukoluwa) | 7° 30.610' | 80° 45.792' | 811 m |
| MN12 | 7° 30.646' | 80° 45.798' | 828 m |
| MN13 | 7° 30.748' | 80° 45.908' | 842 m |
| MN14 | 7° 30.802' | 80° 45.892' | 889 m |
| MN15 | 7° 30.826' | 80° 45.866' | 935 m |
| MN16 | 7° 30.840' | 80° 45.880' | 943 m |
| MN17 | 7° 30.926' | 80° 45.901' | 951 m |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|-------------|--------|
| MN18 | 7° 31.209' | 80° 46.070' | 968 m |
| MN19 | 7° 31.293' | 80° 46.138' | 996 m |
| MN20 | 7° 31.309' | 80° 46.157' | 1002 m |
| MN21 | 7° 31.336' | 80° 46.178' | 1003 m |
| MN22 | 7° 31.366' | 80° 46.228' | 1008 m |
| MN23 | 7° 31.409' | 80° 46.319' | 1007 m |
| MN24 | 7° 31.419' | 80° 46.415' | 1079 m |
| MN25 | 7° 31.416' | 80° 46.429' | 1092 m |
| MN26 | 7° 31.435' | 80° 46.452' | 1100 m |
| MN27 (Maningala summit) | 7° 31.452' | 80° 46.476' | 1104 m |
| MN28 | 7° 31.522' | 80° 46.530' | 1048 m |
| MN29 | 7° 31.560' | 80° 46.553' | 1018 m |
| MN30 | 7° 31.564' | 80° 46.553' | 999 m |
| MN31 | 7° 31.619' | 80° 46.586' | 973 m |
| MN32 | 7° 31.660' | 80° 46.587' | 957 m |
| MN33 | 7° 31.678' | 80° 46.568' | 953 m |
| MN34 | 7° 31.715' | 80° 46.565' | 931 m |
| MN35 | 7° 31.753' | 80° 46.644' | 876 m |
| MN36 | 7° 31.862' | 80° 46.639' | 815 m |
| MN37 | 7° 31.873' | 80° 46.589' | 797 m |
| MN38 | 7° 31.906' | 80° 46.490' | 754 m |
| MN39 | 7° 31.927' | 80° 46.467' | 716 m |
| MN40 | 7° 31.951' | 80° 46.409' | 678 m |
| MN41 | 7° 31.980' | 80° 46.365' | 597 m |
| MN42 | 7° 32.031' | 80° 46.368' | 582 m |
| MN43 | 7° 32.155' | 80° 46.345' | 561 m |
| MN44 (forest office – Illukkumbura) | 7° 32.208' | 80° 46.349' | 483 m |