



THE TRAIL ORGANISER

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Last year, in the high altitude meadows of Ali Bugyal in Uttarakhand, a group of intrepid trekkers was making its way to the next camp. As it popped out of the tree line, the weather began to deteriorate—but not enough for the team to be concerned. The gentle rumble of thunder just about hung in the air. As the trekkers topped the ridge, a sudden streak of lightning snaked out and struck one of the trekkers. No one even realised what happened. After the deafening sound died, they looked around to find one of their mates on the ground, his charred body still smoking. He was a 24-year-old software engineer.

Most of the trekker community concluded that the poor fellow was at fault—the lightning found the nearest metal object and the trekker was carrying a live cellphone, its electronic circuits the easiest target. An unspoken circular rang out in the hills asking trekkers not to carry their cellphones or metal objects in their backpacks, not even steel-rimmed glasses. Being composed mainly of electrolytes, the human body is a better conductor of electricity than a cellphone. And, up in the meadows, a group of trekkers sticks out. Yet, most don't think a lightning hit is possible.


What should you do? First, if you get a hint of thunder even in the far distance, beware. Lightning can strike you from two kilometres away. The shelter of the forest is the best refuge if caught in such a situation. The logic: Lightning can't find you in the cluster of trees. It strikes the tallest tree instead. If the tree line is not in sight, then stop where you are, crouch to a small ball, spread out so that there's 15-20 feet between trekkers, throw your backpack away and wait until the bad weather

passes. Don't think you can outrun the bad weather!

Last July, I received an anxious call to help find a trekker who'd gone missing on the Mayali Pass trek. My heart sank because I knew he would never be found... he was last seen disappearing into the mist and two days had passed. On a trek in Sikkim, I was briefly separated from the rest. The mist enveloped me and I remember feeling very romantic about the setting. I continued and kept climbing, but always kept to the

trail. After about 30 minutes I realised something was wrong. I should have bumped into the others by then. I called out into the mist but did not get a reply. Sense struck and I decided to wait until the mist cleared. That's when I found, to my horror, that I'd climbed 500 feet and my mates were tiny dots below. A few feet ahead of me was a sharp drop. In the mist, stop, huddle together and wait, because it is never stationary and clears with a rise in temperature. Can't see ahead? Stop trekking.

Recently, two mountaineering enthusiasts and an instructor were

attempting a simple summit in Himachal. Over a large snow field, they decided to unhitch their rope, walk towards the base of a cliff from where they'd again climb, roped up. They waved at each other and moved forward, when a large blanket of cloud rolled in. They lost sight of each other and when they reached the end 20 minutes later, one of them was missing. They looked everywhere, a helicopter was summoned, but he was never found. The cloud and the mist had claimed another. 

**IN THE MIST,
EVERYTHING LOOKS
UNIFORM. THERE IS
NO ORIENTATION OF
HOW HIGH YOU ARE OR
YOUR LOCATION. YOUR
SENSE OF DIRECTION
IS SKEWED AND YOU
BECOME DISORIENTED.**

Arjun is the founder of Indiahikes, a blogger and an experienced trekker. He takes a keen interest in training youngsters to appreciate our trails.