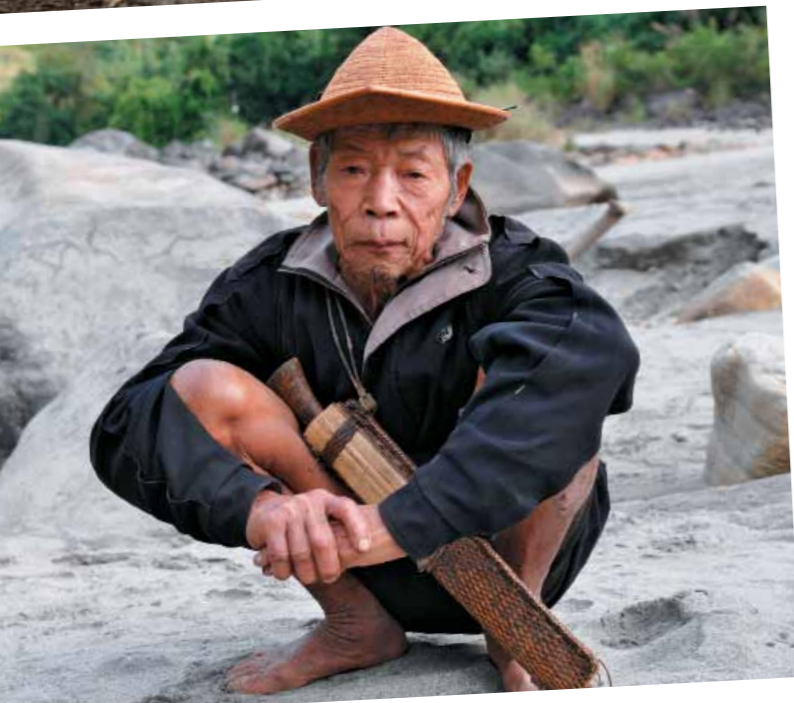
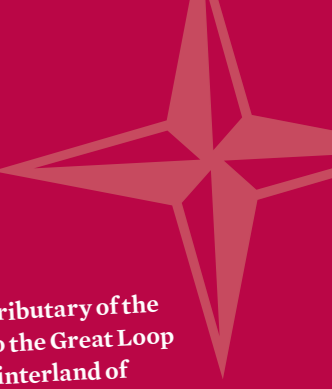


ADVENTURE SUBANSIRI



Mellow yet dramatic, giggly and flirty, Subansiri—the ‘golden river’—trails a dazzling path. A major tributary of the Brahmaputra, it drains the waters beyond the Himalayan ranges spanning from Tsona Dzong up to the Great Loop of the Tsangpo in Tibet. It then enters the eastern Himalaya at Asaphila into the rugged, isolated hinterland of Arunachal Pradesh’s Upper Subansiri District. Flowing like liquid emerald through dense rainforest, the river then charts a different course. Very difficult terrain with vertical rock faces, no road support for 150km of its run and sparse habitation in the lower reaches has kept a major part of this river’s raftable run isolated and remote. The river itself is demanding because of its heavy volume and flow. Our interactions with the warmhearted hill tribes further enhanced the otherworldliness of an uncommon, sometimes difficult, but extremely rewarding journey.



THE LONG WAY DOWN

A BIG DAM THREATENS THE SUBANSIRI RIVER, THE WILDERNESS AROUND IT AND ITS PRISTINE BEACHES. IF YOU WANT TO RAFT DOWN THIS RIVER, THIS IS PROBABLY YOUR LAST CHANCE.
TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY **AHTUSHI DESHPANDE**





THE RIVER

Between the smoothsailing sections of this little-explored gem lie turbulences where the water hurtles forward furiously, throwing up frothy bubbles of pristine whitewater. These adrenaline-inducing rapids pack a mean punch from the upper section of demanding rapids to the almost continuous pool-drop rapids and long-wave trains of the lower remote section. Kicking off from So Nala on a descent to Koda, we spent eight days on the river, descending 925 feet on a 164km run.





THE PEOPLE

One of the many great things about this river journey is the peek it affords into local culture, especially on the first two days of the run. The Tagin, seen in the picture on top, put the plentifully available bamboo to good use: they live in bamboo homes built on bamboo stilts, and use it to make everything from swaying bridges to intricate woven baskets. The Tagin still hunt in the forests here but, of late, fishing has also become a major activity. New roads and cable TV are visibly changing lives and livelihoods in the region.



SUBANSIRI



THE BEACHES

A substantial stretch of the lower river run is through a remote, uninhabited canyon gorge with no road support. The pristine beaches along the banks here are fringed with dense rainforest, and the cool waters make swimming in the river here particularly pleasurable. The surroundings make for wonderful beach parties too; ours typically began with sundowners at an early 4pm, with excited talk of rapid-bashings and conquests around a bonfire.





THE INFORMATION

THE THREAT

Time is running out for Arunachal's wild river, as South Asia's largest dam at Gerukamukh fills up the wilderness around its higher stretches. The dam is scheduled for completion by early 2013. When the dam waters are released, a massive 38,000 sq km of rainforest will be lost—as will its unique flora and fauna. On the last few trips, in fact, tiger tracks were spotted just five kilometres upstream of the dam.



It is a popular misconception that river rafting, especially an expedition-style run like this one, is an exclusive adventure only for the experienced river junkie. In fact, it takes **amateurs** less than an hour to master the paddling commands and techniques that the very capable guides will teach you. **Non-swimmers** too are wel-

come on the trip; the life jacket ensures that you won't drown. Pregnant women and heart patients are not allowed, and there is a lower age limit of 16 years.

GETTING THERE

From **Dibrugarh**, it's a ferry ride and a two-day drive to **So Nala**, from where the actual river run

begins. From So Nala to **Gerukamukh dam** is a total of 164km and takes eight days, including a day of rest. If you're leaving from Delhi, Aquaterra, the tour operator I used, will take care of all transport.

THE RIVER RUN

Beautiful beaches make for lovely **campsites** day after day, **tents** are assigned on twin-sharing basis and all **equipment** is provided, including wet suits, life jackets, helmets and booties. The only thing you need to bring is a sleeping bag and lots of spirit. Aquaterra sent us a **pre-departure kit**, which had all the information we needed, including a packing list.

Total number of days: 12

Grade: Challenging

- > DAY 1 So Nala to Koda. Technical section with grade 4 and 3+ rapids
- > DAY 2 Koda to Tajina bridge camp; 3+ run
- > DAY 3 Tajina to Menga elephant camp; 3+ run
- > DAY 4 Menga to Wilderness camp; 2 and 3+ run
- > DAY 5 Wilderness to Sunshine camp; smooth remote gorge run

- > DAY 6 Sunshine camp to Paradise beach; twelve grade 3 rapids
- > DAY 7 Rest day
- > DAY 8 Sail to dam site and put out

SCHEDULE & TARIFF

Aquaterra will lead a Subansiri river expedition next from November 30 to December 11, 2011. **COST** Rs 1,30,000, including Delhi-Dibrugarh return economy fare. **CONTACT** vaibhav@aquaterra.in, aquaterra.in

Calm waters on the last day of the run

