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The Purvanchal Hills

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The Purvanchal Hills

Somewhere near the Brahmaputra, the Himalaya makes a hairpin turn and heads south. What follows that turn is a whole separate hill system, guarding India’s border with Myanmar.



The Naga Hills, part of the Purvanchal Range, Kiphire district, Nagaland. Photo: Joli Rumi, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The Purvanchal Hills at a glance

Where the Himalaya bends south and becomes India’s eastern frontier

01

Where

Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and parts of Assam.

02

Four hill systems

Patkai, Naga, Manipur, and Mizo Hills.

03

Highest point

Saramati, about 3,826 m, on the Nagaland-Myanmar border.

04

A real first

Namdapha — likely the only park on Earth with all four big cats.

Syntaxial bend A sharp bend in a mountain range, where its direction changes abruptly — here, where the Himalaya turns from east-west to north-south.

Phumdi A floating mat of vegetation and soil, thick enough in places to walk on, build on, or farm.

Jhum cultivation Shifting farming: clear a plot, farm it for a few years, then move on and let the land recover before returning.

Bas-relief A carving where the figure stands out only slightly from its flat background, rather than being fully three-dimensional.

The Basics

Must Know

Where the Himalaya Turns South

- **What it is:** the easternmost extension of the Himalaya, in India's northeast.
- **Where it starts:** the Himalaya bends sharply south near the Dihang Gorge, at a point called the **Eastern Syntaxial Bend**.
- **The border:** the range runs along India's border with Myanmar, and touches Bangladesh and China too — a genuinely international frontier zone.
- **Where it runs:** spans Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and parts of Assam.



States of Northeast India, home to the Purvanchal Hills. Map: Renzut, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Worked example: trace the Himalaya on a map from Kashmir eastward. Around the Brahmaputra, the whole range abruptly turns and heads south instead of continuing east. That single hairpin turn is the Eastern Syntaxial Bend. Everything south of it is Purvanchal.

Its Four Components

Must Know

Four Hill Systems, Not One

- **The components:** its main components are the Patkai Hills, Naga Hills, Manipur Hills, and Mizo Hills.
- **Patkai:** sits on the Arunachal Pradesh-Myanmar border, at the range's northern end — marking the point where the Purvanchal properly begins.

Quick check 1. The Purvanchal Hills are made up of four distinct hill systems: Patkai, Naga, Manipur, and Mizo. *(True or False?)*

See answer ↓

Elevations and Peaks

Good to Know

A Ring Around a Valley

- **Manipur Hills:** form an oval ring around the central Imphal Valley, with elevations between about 900 and 2,100 metres. They shelter the valley below from harsh weather.
- **Mizo Hills:** mainly in Mizoram, run as alternating parallel ridges and valleys, with elevations from about 150 to over 1,500 metres across the state.
- **Highest point:** Saramati, on the Nagaland-Myanmar border, is the highest peak in the entire Purvanchal system, at roughly 3,826 metres.

Loktak Lake

Good to Know

Islands That Float on the Lake

- **Loktak Lake:** inside the ring formed by the Manipur Hills. It's the largest freshwater lake in northeast India, and a designated Ramsar wetland.
- **Phumdis:** its surface holds **phumdis**, thick floating mats of vegetation and soil — some sturdy enough to support entire fishing villages.
- **A floating park:** Keibul Lamjao National Park, built on the lake's phumdis, is the world's only floating national park, and home to the endangered Sangai deer.

Think it through. *How can a national park actually float on a lake's surface?*

Show the explanation

A phumdi isn't a thin film. It's a thick mat of living plants, dead roots, and soil, built up over years until it's dense enough to hold weight. Keibul Lamjao's phumdi can support trees, grazing deer, and even human visitors walking across it — all while still floating and shifting gently with the lake's water level.

Namdapha National Park

Good to Know

Four Big Cats, One Forest

- **Namdapha:** in Arunachal Pradesh's Patkai Hills, near the Myanmar border. It's likely the only protected area on Earth holding all four big cats.
- **The four:** tiger, leopard, clouded leopard, and snow leopard all share this single reserve, split across its different forest zones.
- **Why that's possible:** Namdapha's habitats range from tropical rainforest to alpine meadow, letting species with very different needs coexist within one park.

Quick check 2. Namdapha National Park is likely the only protected area on Earth home to all four big cats. *(True or False?)*

See answer ↓

Exam Edge

The Real Exam Trap on This Topic

- **The trap:** exams slip a Kashmir-region range into a list of Purvanchal components. They're betting you'll recognise "Himalaya" and not check the actual location.
- **The real test:** the Pir Panjal Range belongs to the main Himalaya in Jammu and Kashmir, nowhere near Purvanchal. Patkai, Naga, Manipur, and Mizo Hills are the real four.
- **How to prepare:** anchor Purvanchal to "northeast, borders Myanmar," and Pir Panjal to "Kashmir." This swap stops working.

Its Geology

Great to Know

Same Collision, Different Direction

- **Shared origin:** the Purvanchal formed through the same tectonic collision that raised the main Himalaya. It just curved south around the syntaxial bend.
- **A real contrast:** this makes it geologically continuous with the Himalaya — distinct from unrelated systems like the Vindhya or Satpura.
- **A distinct biodiversity zone:** the hills fall within the Indo-Malayan biodiversity realm, giving them a species mix found nowhere else in India.

Phawngpui

Great to Know

A Blue Peak Wrapped in Cloud

- **Phawngpui:** the “Blue Mountain,” Mizoram’s highest peak, at about 2,157 metres. It sits deep in the Mizo Hills, near the Myanmar border.
- **Why “Blue”:** a thin, near-constant layer of cloud gives the mountain its distinctive blue look from a distance, and its name.
- **Protected:** Phawngpui National Park, established in 1992, protects the peak’s rich flora, fauna, and butterfly diversity.

Dzukou Valley

Great to Know

A Valley Famous for Its Flowers

- **Dzukou Valley:** straddling the Nagaland-Manipur border, at about 2,452 metres, is famous for its seasonal wildflower blooms.
- **Rare birds:** also home to rare, vulnerable species like Blyth’s tragopan, Nagaland’s state bird, along with the rufous-necked hornbill and the dark-rumped swift.
- **Farming here too:** many local communities across these hills practise **jhum**, or shifting, cultivation. They farm a plot for a few years, then move on to let it recover.

The Hornbill Festival

Great to Know

Seventeen Tribes, One Stage

- **Hornbill Festival:** every December, Nagaland’s Hornbill Festival brings together all major Naga tribes. It’s held at Kisama village, near Kohima in the Naga Hills.

- **What happens:** each tribe builds its own traditional morung hut, and performs its own dances, songs, and cuisine — all in one shared space.
- **Why it started:** launched in 2000 to promote tourism, it has since become a genuine platform for Naga cultural unity across a very diverse hill population.

Unakoti

Great to Know

A Hillside Carved With Faces

- **Unakoti:** in the Unakoti hills near Kailasahar, in Tripura's Unakoti district. It is not in the Jampui Hills, a separate range in North Tripura district. It holds one of India's largest collections of rock-cut carvings, dating to roughly the 7th to 9th centuries.
- **The centrepiece:** its best-known carving is a 30-foot rock-cut face of Shiva, among the largest **bas-relief** figures anywhere in India.
- **Recognition:** Unakoti joined UNESCO's tentative World Heritage list in December 2022, still waiting on full inscription. It's a rare archaeological anchor in a range better known for its hills than its monuments.

> **Quick check 3.** Unakoti, in the Unakoti hills of Tripura, features a 30-foot rock-cut carving of Shiva's face. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Fire Races Toward Manipur's Highest Peak (2026)

- **The fire:** in late January 2026, a wildfire in Dzukou Valley spread for several days toward Mount Esii, Manipur's highest peak. NDRF teams were deployed. (Source: Deccan Herald)
- **The response:** the Indian Air Force and Assam Rifles joined containment efforts. Dry weather and strong winds had fanned the blaze across these forested slopes. (Source: Deccan Herald)
- **Why it matters here:** this is the same flower-famous, bird-rich valley described earlier in this article. Steep, forested terrain like this is exactly the kind of place dry-season fires threaten most.

Quick Q&A

Q: What marks the start of the Purvanchal Hills?

A: The Eastern Syntaxial Bend, near the Dihang Gorge, where the Himalaya sharply turns south.

Q: What's the odd-one-out trap exams use for this topic?

A: Slipping the Pir Panjal Range (actually in Kashmir) into a list of real Purvanchal components — Patkai, Naga, Manipur, and Mizo Hills.

Q: What makes Keibul Lamjao unique among national parks?

A: It's built entirely on phumdis — floating mats of vegetation on Loktak Lake — making it the world's only floating national park.

Q: Why is jhum cultivation significant for Mizoram specifically?

A: More than 50% of the state's area is under jhum (shifting) cultivation — a real PYQ fact tested by CAPF 2022.

🔗 Related Topics

- All Indian Geography Articles
- Arunachal Pradesh — home to the Patkai Hills and the Eastern Syntaxial Bend.
- Nagaland — home to the Naga Hills, Saramati peak, and Dzukou Valley.
- Manipur — home to the Manipur Hills ringing the Imphal Valley.
- Mizoram — home to the Mizo Hills and this article's jhum-cultivation PYQ.
- The Brahmaputra River System — the river whose Namcha Barwa bend marks this range's own starting point.
- IndGeo0007 — Physiography of India — places the Purvanchal within India's full six-division physical map.

✅ Test Yourself

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Practice MCQs

1. The Purvanchal Hills form the easternmost extension of which major mountain system?

A. The Himalaya

B. The Aravalli Range

C. The Western Ghats

D. The Vindhya Range

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **A.** The Purvanchal Hills form the easternmost extension of the Himalaya, beginning where it bends sharply south near the Dihang Gorge. ↑ Q1

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** The Purvanchal really is made of four separate hill systems — Patkai, Naga, Manipur, and Mizo Hills — not one continuous range. ↑ 1
2. **False.** Namdapha National Park really is thought to be the only protected area on Earth holding tiger, leopard, clouded leopard, and snow leopard together — made possible by its huge range of habitats. ↑ 2
3. **False.** Unakoti really does hold one of India's largest rock-cut carving collections, centred on a 30-foot bas-relief face of Shiva, dating to roughly the 7th to 9th centuries. ↑ 3

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