

Ⓢ TRAIL

The Legacy of Lonar Crater

⬢ 8.5 KM

📍 GAIMUKH TEMPLE

The Lonar meteorite crater, located to the east of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar (formerly Aurangabad), is reachable within three hours by road from the city. Lonar is the youngest and smallest crater in India with well-preserved geography, unique geology, and distinct biodiversity.

This hypervelocity impact structure was formed in the Pleistocene geological epoch, approximately 30,000–50,000 thousand years ago. The crater's basaltic target rock provides rare geological insight into how meteorite impacts interact with volcanic bedrock. Additionally, the crater hosts a distinct ecosystem where saline-alkaline water bodies and freshwater streams coexist, fostering unique microbial life that thrives in such extreme conditions. This makes Lonar a significant site not just for geological and ecological studies, but also for understanding structures on other planetary bodies.

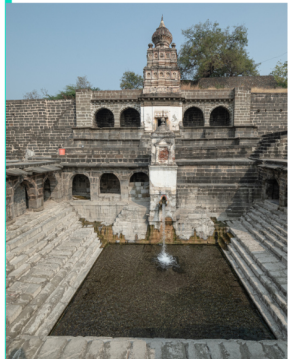
Lonar's geological significance is equally complemented by its cultural identity as an eminent religious centre. The crater and its environs have been revered by Hindu and Jain worshippers from medieval times, traces of which are extant in the forms of temples, tanks, and monasteries built in and around the vicinity of the crater. The piousness of the crater has made it a pilgrimage site and earned it the nomenclature of Virajkshetra and Vishnugaya, a place that cures ailments, fulfils people's wishes,

and helps attain liberation.

This trail, covering almost half the circumference of Lonar Lake, follows the natural geography of the crater, made up of rugged rocky roads and water streams, interspersed with several monuments carved in stone that were built at different periods in history.

1 Gaimukh Temple and the Sacred Dhar (stream)

The trail begins at the Gaimukh Temple, also known as the Dhar Tirth, from which the descent to the lake begins. A picturesque view of the



entire crater is the most alluring feature of this location. The Dhar Tirth premises are a conglomerate of temples, *kundas* (small square tanks), and *samadhis* (memorials) built between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries CE. The central shrine is dedicated to Daityasudan, an incarnation

of Vishnu. Below this temple is a *kunda* from which flows the perennial fresh water spring known as Ganga Bhogawati which is believed to have healing properties. An adjacent *kunda* has temples to Narsimha, Ganpati, Renuka, and Mahadev on its fringe that are stylistically datable to the thirteenth century CE. Built in stone, all these temples have distinct interiors and exteriors with depictions of forms of the deity Vishnu, stories from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, animals, and floral motifs.

2 Papaharshwar Temple Ruins and Tank

The Papaharshwar Temple is located slightly lower and to the south, accessed by a small passage from the corner of Dhar Tirth. It is a mystic yet serene spot, away from the bustling crowd of the Gaimukh Temple. Though partially ruined and later renovated, only its



garbhagriha (sanctum) remains, along with a large stepped tank beside it. In front of the temple stands a beautifully carved free-standing *mandapa*, with intricate designs on its pillars, ceiling, and plinth mouldings. This *mandapa* (pillared hall or pavilion) is one of the earliest structures in Lonar. Nearby, there is a striking life-size sculpture of a seated Jain *tirthankar*. One cannot miss the scattered ruins all around the temple premises which reveal that this location was home to a large structure at some point.

3 From Kumareshwar to Yadneshwar Temple; en route to Lonar Lake

Situated midway between the crater's rim and the saltwater lake, the Kumareshwar and Yadneshwar temples are easily accessible from Dhar Tirth. The Kumareshwar Temple, dedicated to Shiva, enshrines a Shivalinga and has been referenced in medieval texts written in the thirteenth century CE. Over time, incongruous additions and restorations have obscured its original layout, yet traces of a *barav* (stepwell), niches, pillars, motifs and sparse iconography hint at its past grandeur. Further down the path lies the Yadneshwar Temple, also known as Shukracharya's Vedashala, believed to have been a centre for ascetic practices and Vedic rituals. Nearby, the Bhasma Tekadi



hillock, with its ash-coloured soil, is thought to be the sacred remains of countless yagnas performed here.

4 Wagh and Mor Temples

The Wagh and Mor Temples stand along the southeastern edge of the saltwater lake, their names inspired by the wildlife that inhabits the surrounding forest. These temples remain better preserved than the



temples on the northern side of the lake; however, in recent years, rising water levels have led to damage, especially to the Mor Temple. Built as standalone structures, these temples rest on raised stone platforms adorned with simple moldings and scattered carvings. Their layouts are nearly identical, featuring a *garbhagriha*, an *antarala* (vestibule), and a *gudhamandapa* (spacious hall) with three entrances. The temples are located along a scenic walkway. During high water levels, the lake comes close to the temples, adding to their mystique.

5 The Kamalja Mata temple

Situated along the southern side of the crater, the Kamalja Devi Temple stands opposite the Dhar Tirth Temple. The temple complex includes the main Devi temple, the well-known Sasu-Sunechi Vihir, a *deepamala* (lamp pillar), and a small ruined shrine within its premises. There is an interesting story about the well near the temple. For the greater part of the year, the well remains submerged under the lake. However, when the lake water recedes, the exposed well is found to be filled with sweet water, unlike the salty water of the lake. Kamalja Devi is revered as the patron deity of Lonar. This temple also marks the last spot in the trail along Lonar Lake.



debris clearance has restored the stream's flow. According to legend, Lord Rama visited this temple and bathed in its waters during his pilgrimage to Lonar, further elevating its religious significance. Today, the temple enshrines a standing two-armed figure of Rama. Ramgaya would be the last location to be visited in the Lonar lake environs.

7 Motha Maruti Temple and the Ambar Lake

6 Ramgaya Temple

Overlooking the river the Ramgaya Temple is situated on the mid-landing toward the lake. Interestingly, it is located at a similar ground elevation to the Yadneshwar temple. The complex consists of the Ramgaya Temple, the Mahadev Temple, a small Hanuman shrine, and a *kunda* fed by a natural spring named after the temple. Recent



The Motha Maruti Temple sits near Ambar Lake, slightly removed from the bustling village and surrounded by serene farmlands. According to a few studies, Ambar Lake was also formed during the creation of the Lonar crater owing to a small fragment of the meteorite that fell here. However, there is no consensus regarding this. The temple has a unique life-size image of Hanuman in a reclining posture, earning it

the name Jhopalela Maruti—the Sleeping Hanuman Temple. The temple has long been in the care of the Kanitkar family. The story goes that in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, a man from the Kanitkar family travelled to Lonar after receiving a divine vision of Hanuman calling for rescue. Guided by his vision, he searched the barren lands near Ambar Lake and eventually discovered an abandoned Hanuman idol. A temple was then built at the site, and the Kanitkar family later settled in Lonar to safeguard and maintain it.



8

The Daityasudan Temple

In the village of Lonar, the Daityasudan temple complex is a site rich in history and architectural beauty. This complex includes the Daityasudan Temple, the Garud Temple (also sometimes called as Brahma Temple), the Samadhi Temple which is a memorial built for a seer named Sacchidashram Swami, and the remains of other structures. All of these are enclosed within ancient fortification walls. Built in the thirteenth century CE, and facing east, the temple has a unique design, with both the sanctum and the front hall featuring a star-shaped layout.

The temple's outer walls are intricately decorated with carvings. A highlight of the temple is the ceiling of the vestibule, which features sculptural panels. One of these panels tells the creation myth of Lonar, showing Vishnu in his Daityasudan form defeating the demon Lavanasur—an image that gives the temple its name.

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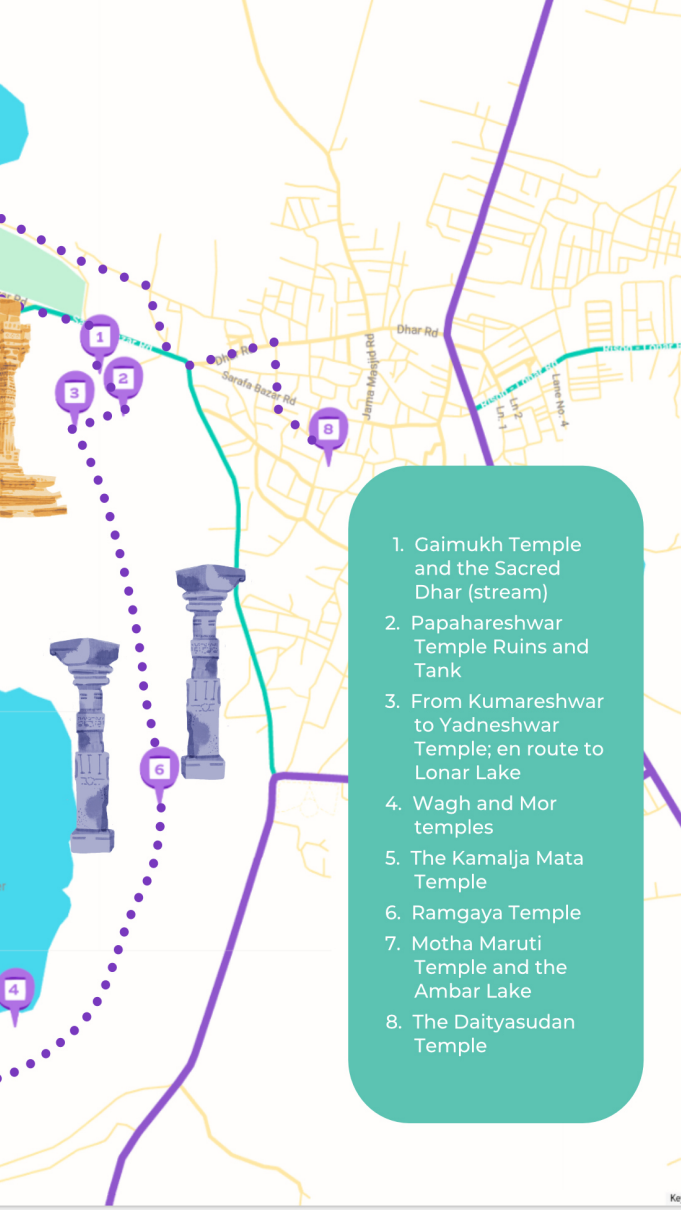
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Sarafa Bazar Rd

Lonar Lake
लोणार सरोवर

Lonar Crater



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2. Papahareswar Temple Ruins and Tank
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