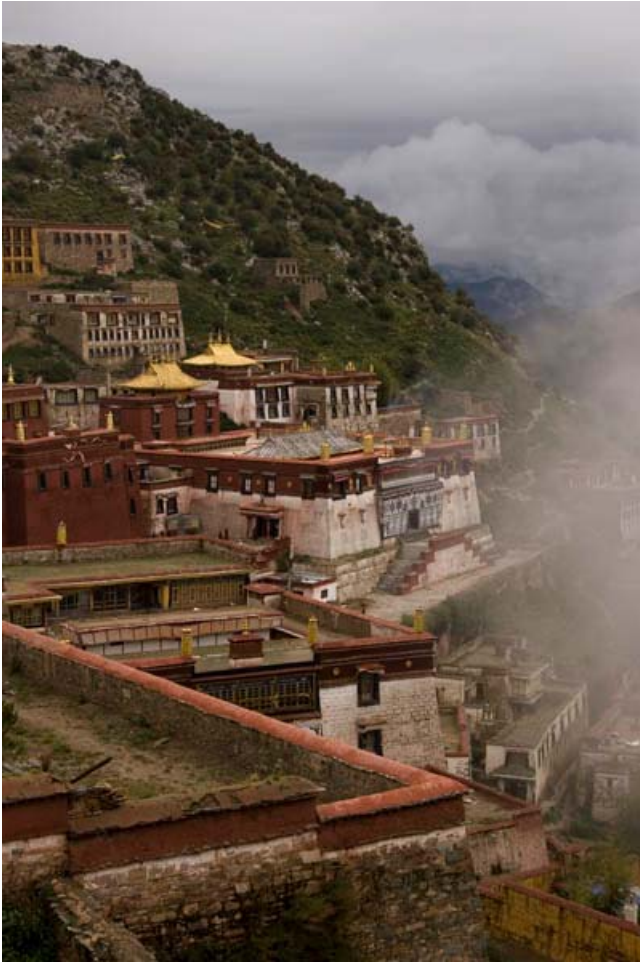


## **Ganden to Samye trek (9/5/2007-9/9/2007)**

As of September 1<sup>st</sup> “the powers that be” here in Tibet (i.e. the Chinese Government) decided that it would now take 10 days to get a permit for Mount Kailash instead of the previous 3 days. Having been to most of the attractions around Lhasa on my pervious trip I jumped at the opportunity to hike the 80 km (50 miles) from Ganden monastery to Samye monastery with an Alaskan gold miner who was also going out on the same trip with me to Kailash. He had come to Tibet prepared to trek, bringing with him a tent, stove, and water filter, so all I had to do was rent a sleeping bag. The trek is a fairly popular route between two of the most important monasteries in Tibet. Ganden monastery was founded by the Tongkhapa the founder of the yellow hat school of Tibetan Buddhism which the Dali Lama adheres too, while Samye was the first monastery in Tibet. While the trek is popular, meaning at any given day during the summer there are probably between 2-8 people on the same stretch of the trail, it is not that easy, the trail crosses a 5250 m (17,325 ft) pass and a 5100 m (16,830 ft) pass. After the first day my Alaskan counterpart realized the pack plus the altitude would be too much so he hired a horse to carry his pack and mine, which I didn’t complain about. The main point of concern was the weather, although the monsoon which hits Nepal and leaks into Tibet over the Himalayas was supposed to end sometime in September, as of yet it hadn’t. This means rain is likely and even snow at higher elevations. Fortunately the rain was confined to the evenings for the most part. The third day of the trek as we hiked over the 5100 m pass it snowed, a wet snow that melted on impact which turned first to freezing rain and then to cold rain once we descended to lower altitude. Needless to say that day was less than pleasant. It did finally let up about noon. Most of the trek passed through beautiful green alpine valleys dotted with yak herds and the occasional lake. The coldest and highest night was spent between the two passes at an elevation of 5000 m (16,500 ft) more than 2000 ft higher than the highest point in the continental US. As well as acclimated as I was, having spent most of the last month on the Tibetan plateau, I still got a bit of a headache that night from the altitude. The air is amazingly thin at that elevation, breathing feels like an exercise in futility, since there is so little oxygen to be had. We arrived at Samye around noon on the fourth day and spent the day there exploring the monastery. I climbed up the nearby scared hill for a spectacular view of the surrounding valley and the monastery. It was fortuitous that we ended up staying in a small guesthouse just outside the monastery gates as we found out the next day that people who stayed in the monastery guesthouse had there permits checked. You are theoretically supposed to get yet another permit to go to Samye but many people don’t and we didn’t either. In fact trekking on your own is also technically illegal but rarely enforced as the police generally don’t want to hike up into the mountains just to harass a few tourists. We made it back to Lhasa managing to avoid getting fined.



**Ganden monastery as we left on the trek to Samye.**



**Ganden monastery as we left on the trek to Samye.**



**Yak on the trail.**



**Looking back towards Lhasa from the trail to Samye.**



**Clouds clinging to the mountains along the trail.**



**Yaks on there way back down the valley.**



**Late afternoon sun on the green mountains above our campsite on the first night.**



**Fresh snow on the mountains above our campsite on the first night.**



**Threatening clouds as a storm blows in.**



**Yak and handler making their way up the first 5250 m (17,325 ft) pass.**



**Yak grazing as it makes its way up the first 5250 m (17,325 ft) pass.**



**Yak skulls and prayer flags marking the 5250 m (17,325 ft) pass.**



**View descending from the 5250 m (17,325 ft) pass.**



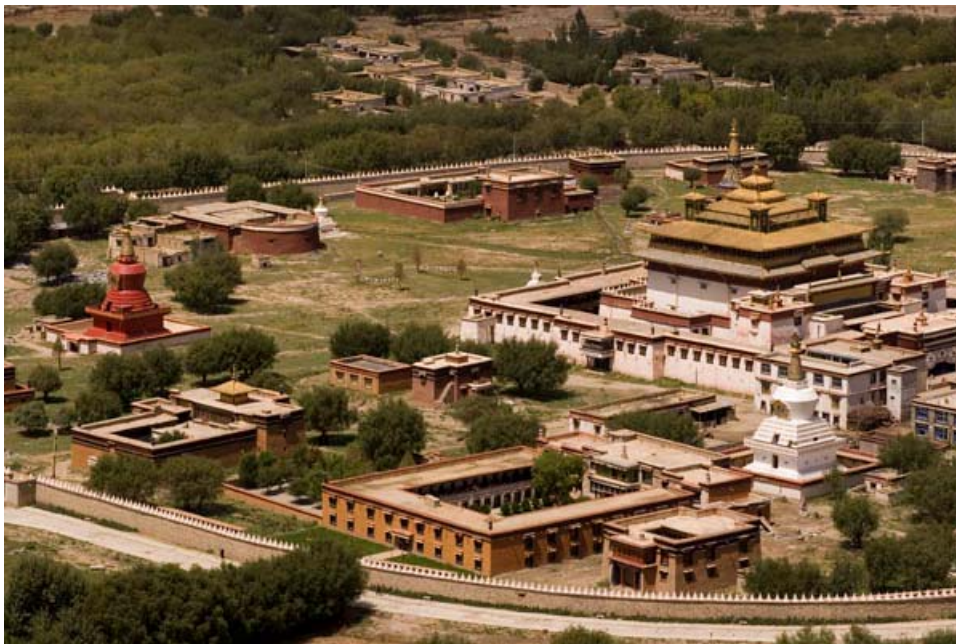
**Me about to get snowed on at the top of the 5100 m (16,830 ft) pass.**



**Goat skull and prayer flags marking the top of the 5100 m (16,830 ft) pass.**



**Nomad kids along the trail to Samye.**



**Samye monastery from above, it's laid out in the form of a Mandala the Buddhist representation of the world.**