

The Cho La to Gokyo (5/24/2008-5/27/2008)

It snowed most of the day I hiked to Dzonglha, the last lodge before the 5420m/17,782 ft pass to the Gokyo Valley known as the Cho La. At the lodge in Dzonglha I met, Ben, an outdoor enthusiast from Minneapolis, Minnesota, with the accent to match. He had started his travels a year ago. After quitting his job and selling his house he cycled across the western United States, reaching the west coast he flew to Europe and cycled there until winter. During the winter he had settled in the French Alps skiing through the spring when he hopped on a flight to Nepal to trek the Everest region. Next on his plate was a flight back to the states with the goal of hiking the Pacific Crest Trail from Mexico to the Canadian border. Like myself, he was hiking with a flexible schedule and similar itinerary, and we ended up hiking together the rest of the trek.

The next morning was a rollercoaster of weather induced emotion. Waking up to clear skies, I was elated, not eager to hike over the pass in a viewless snowstorm similar to the previous day. That elation turned quickly into disappointment, as literally minutes later clouds rolled in, swamping the landscape in a layer of fog. As Ben and I ate breakfast pondering whether or not we should continue over the pass today the early morning sun burnt its way through the clouds revealing the beautiful snow rimmed valley we were now in for the first time. Not wasting any time, wanting to maximize our time under the clear skies, we hit the trail heading towards the pass. The way up to the pass was gorgeous; the previous day's snow had blanketed the upper end of the valley in white. This was beautiful to look at, but it made finding the trail significantly more difficult. As we hiked up over snow and ice covered rocks we praised our good weather and couldn't imagine successfully navigating the trail up to and across the glacier at the top of the pass had the weather not been so good.

I had heard many people rave about the beauty of the Gokyo Valley, and I found those raves to be perfectly justified upon reaching the settlement of lodges on the banks of a turquoise lake surrounded by snow covered jagged peaks. The place was made even more enchanting by the friendly Shrepa proprietors of the Gokyo Namaste Lodge who offered free rooms in exchange for eating their delicious food, some of the best lodge food I'd had on the trek. The first couple days in Gokyo were a battle with the clouds, which would tantalizingly reveal only a few the spectacular surrounding peaks like a seductive strip tease. Two pre-dawn hikes up the 5340m/17,519 ft view point of Gokyo Ri yielded good, although partially cloud obscured views of the valley. The peaks in the direction of Everest were covered in clouds on both occasions. However, as we hiked to the fifth lake further up the valley on the afternoon of our second day in Gokyo, with nearly all of the other peaks covered in clouds, Everest was not, in a rare exception to the typically elusive nature of the mountain.

Atonement for two days of mild frustration with the weather was made by the brilliant weather on our third day in Gokyo. With hardly a cloud in the sky we hiked to Ngozumpa-tse, the 5553m/18,214 ft view point known as Knobby View, which lies between the 5th and 6th lakes of the Gokyo Valley. From the rocky top, which on the northern side drops a shear vertical 1000 ft down to the lakes at the foot of Cho Oyu, is probably the most spectacular panoramic view in the Khumbu. Perched atop a tiny rock pinnacle, reached by traversing a narrow ridge on the southern end, there are views of four of the world's six highest mountains. Cho Oyu rises immediately to the north, appearing close enough that one could almost reach out and touch its shear ice covered southern face, and Everest, Lhotse, and Malaku stand like sentinels to the east, while a gaze southward looks down the Ngozumpa Glacier and the lake dotted Gokyo Valley. Neither my words, nor my pictures can do justice to the vastness, scale, and beauty of the surroundings, as we sat in awe atop Knobby View. It felt like a fitting climax to trek filled with spectacular views.



Moon setting over a snow capped peak along the trail up to the Cho La (pass).



View of Ama Dablam along the trail up to the Cho La.



View along the trail up to the Cho La.



View along the trail up to the Cho La.



View along the trail up to the Cho La.



**View from the top of the
Cho La (5420m/17,782 ft).**



View near the top of the Cho La.



**Me crossing the snow covered glacier at the
top of the Cho La (5420m/17,782 ft).**



Early morning view from the top of Gokyo Ri (5340m/17,519 ft).



Early morning view from the top of Gokyo Ri (5340m/17,519 ft).



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Early morning view from the top of Gokyo Ri (5340m/17,519 ft).



Mt. Everest from near the fifth lake in Gokyo Valley.



Mt. Everest from near the fifth lake in Gokyo Valley.



Cho Oyu 6th highest mountain in the world (8201m/26,906 ft) from Gokyo.



Summit of Cho Oyu 6th highest mountain in the world (8201m/26,906 ft) from Gokyo.



Woman collecting yak dung for fuel near the lake, Gokyo.



**Cho Oyu from the fourth lake,
Gokyo Valley.**



**Cho Oyu from the 5553
m/18,214 ft summit of
Ngozumpa-tse known as
Knobby View, Gokyo Valley.**



Snow capped peaks from the 5553 m/18,214 ft summit of Ngozumpa-tse known as Knobby View, Gokyo Valley.



Kangchung west peak, from the 5553 m/18,214 ft summit of Ngozumpa-tse known as Knobby View, Gokyo Valley.



Mt. Everest and Lhotse, from the 5553 m/18,214 ft summit of Ngozumpa-tse known as Knobby View, Gokyo Valley.



Gyachung Kang, from the 5553 m/18,214 ft summit of Ngozumpa-tse known as Knobby View, Gokyo Valley.



Snow capped peak from the 5553 m/18,214 ft summit of Ngozumpa-tse known as Knobby View, Gokyo Valley.



Mt. Everest, from the 5553m/18,214 ft summit of Ngozumpa-tse known as Knobby View, Gokyo Valley.



Me standing in front of the 1000 ft shear drop down to the 6th lakes and the base of Cho Oyu, from the 5553 m/18,214 ft summit of Ngozumpa-tse known as Knobby View, Gokyo Valley.

Gokyo



Cho Oyu (8201m/26,906 ft)



Everest (8848m/29,028 ft)



Lotse (8501m/27,890 ft)



Makalu (8463m/27,765 ft)



360° panorama from Knobby View (5553m/18,214 ft), between the 5th and 6th lakes, Gokyo Valley.