

## **Chukhung to Lobuche, via the Kongma La (5/16/2008-5/19/2008)**

My principal goal in Chukhung was to climb the near by peaks of Chukhung Ri (5559m/18,238 ft) and Chuckhung Tse (5857m/19,216 ft), the highest point in the area not requiring an expensive climbing permit. On my first day I climbed up Chukhung Ri to test my acclimatization and see if I could determine a suitable route up Chuckhung Tse. The nearly 3000 ft climb from Chukhung (4750m/15,584 ft) on the valley floor to the top of Chukhung Ri was a tough but straightforward climb along a well used trail. The higher and true summit of the two Chukhung Ri peaks required a little rock scrambling but nothing too difficult. The views were amazing from the top, staring right into the belly of the massive Nuptse-Lhotse wall, on one side, with Ama Dablam rising from the snow clad ridges like a veiled lady on her wedding day on the other. While the weather was great at the start of my climb, around dawn, by the time I had reached the first of the two Chukhung Ri peaks the clouds had rolled in. Fortunately, as I rested at the true summit the weather cleared, at least to the point where the view consisted of peaks with clouds rather than clouds with the occasional peak.

Feeling confident I could make it up the extra 1000 ft to the summit of Chuckhung Tse, I started off the following morning at dawn, a little before 5:00 am. I decided to take the route traversing a ridge between Chukhung Ri and Chukhung Tse, thus I would climb Chukhung Ri for the second day in a row en route to Chukhung Tse. This route requires a little extra climbing since the ridge descends around 300-400 ft before climbing towards the peak of Chukhung Tse, but I figured if the weather went bad at least I would get good views on the way up. The alternate route passes through a valley and then climbs up Chukhung directly bypassing Chukhung Ri. The weather was magnificent on the climb and even though clouds filled the valley I was still above them, with stunning views of the peaks rising above the clouds. As I worked my way over to Chukhung Tse the clouds began to rise from the valley floor obscuring the view. It was a race against the weather to reach the summit before the clouds. A race, despite my valiant attempt, I would lose. While Chukhung Ri has a well worn path to the summit, once across the ridge it was up to me to find a way to the top of Chukhung Tse. A continued ascent along the ridge was blocked by a 20 ft vertical wall of rock so I was force to traverse around the side looking for a viable way to the top, preferably one that didn't require rock climbing gear and ropes. I decided on a boulder filled gully that looked as if it would go to the summit. It was a steep climb and the lack of oxygen left me completely exhausted. After climbing over a few boulders I would collapse breathless on the first semi-flat place I found, laying there until I regained my breath. At that altitude every few steps felt like I had just finished running a marathon. It was a very slow and difficult climb the last 100 ft to the summit, the most difficult hike I've done. When I reached the top, the clouds had won, and despite being at the highest point I had ever been in my life (5857m/19,216 ft), I could see only a few vague outlines of nearby mountains through the murky clouds. I spent an hour at the top, braving the frigid air hoping for the clouds to clear, but it was to no avail. I made way down the steep scree filled gully to the valley below having conquered the peak while being defeated by the weather.

The next morning I had intended an early departure to Loboche, in the next valley over, via the Kongma La (pass), but when I awoke to cloud covered skies, I decided to stay another day in Chukhung. Bucking the usual trend the skies actually cleared up in mid-morning, and I questioned myself wondering if I had made the right decision to stay. The gap of good weather gave me the chance to climb on of the hills on the south side of the valley (Chukhung Ri and Tse being on the north) for a different view of the stunning landscape around Chukhung.

The following morning my decision to wait a day was proved wise when I awoke to one of the most beautiful mornings I had seen, weather wise, and I set off at dawn towards the 5535m/ 18,159 ft pass of the Kongma La. As I hiked along the ridge towards the pass, high above the valley, the views across of Ama Dablam were some of the best I've had of the picturesque mountain. The path via the Kongma La is not heavily used and I didn't see anyone else along the trail. When hiking along the main routes lined with lodges and tea houses, passing other trekkers and porters in each direction constantly, its easy to

forget how remote a place this really is. However, hiking up to the Kongma La in complete silence which was only occasionally broken by the low thunder of a distant avalanche, I was acutely aware of the remoteness of this region. The isolation in the midst of such incredible surroundings was awe inspiring. The weather stayed clear well into midmorning and as I passed the series of crystal clear lakes leading up to the pass, the white towering pyramid of Ama Dablam was reflected beautifully in there still waters. I reached the settlement of Loboche around 11:30 in the morning a little over 6 hours after I had left Chuckhung. I had intended to stay in Loboche but since it was still early I decided have lunch and continue hiking on to Gorak Shep, a fortuitous decision that would lead to one of the best and most unique experiences of my trek.



**View of the Nuptse-Lhotse wall while climbing Chukhung Ri, above Chukhung.**



**Prayer flags marking the top of Chukhung Ri (5559m/18,238 ft) with the Nuptse-Lhotse wall behind, above Chukhung.**



**Snow capped peak from Chukhung Ri, above Chukhung.**



**View of Imja Lake from Chukhung Ri, above Chukhung.**



**Yak, Chukhung.**



**View of Ama Dablam while climbing Chukhung Ri, above Chukhung.**



**Yak grazing with a view of Ama Dablam while climbing Chukhung Ri, above Chukhung.**



**Ama Dablam from Chukhung Ri,  
above Chukhung.**



**Ama Dablam from Chukhung Ri,  
above Chukhung.**



**Ama Dablam from Chukhung Ri,  
above Chukhung.**



**View while climbing Chukhung  
Ri, above Chukhung.**



**Ama Dablam through the prayer flags marking the top of Chukhung Ri (5559m/18,238 ft), above Chukhung.**



**View while climbing Chukhung Ri en route to Chukhung Tse, above Chukhung. Chukhung Tse (5857m/19,216 ft) is the peak at the end of the ridge from the right of the picture below the snow covered Nuptse-Lhotse wall.**



**Looking towards the peak as the clouds close in around it, while climbing Chukhung Tse (5857m/19,216 ft). So close yet so far.**



**Me at the cloud shrouded summit of Chukhung Tse (5857m/19,216 ft). The highest point I've ever climbed to, and my first time over 19,000 ft not involving an airplane.**



**View from a hill south of Chukhung.**



**View of Ama Dablam from a hill south of Chukhung.**



**View down the valley from Chukhung.**



**View down the valley from the trail to the Kongma La, near Chukhung.**



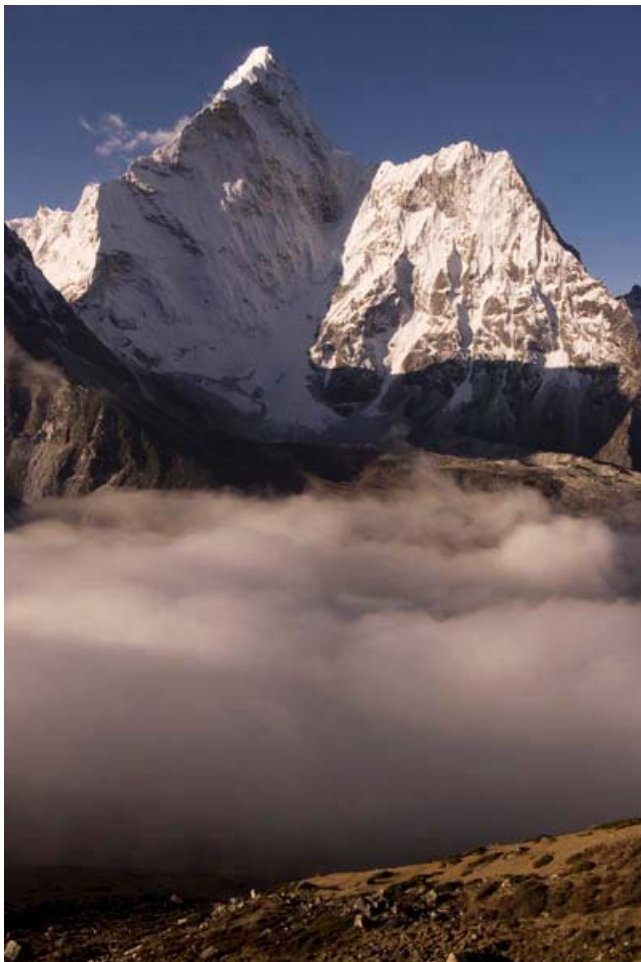
**Ama Dablam from the trail to the Kongma La, near Chukhung.**



**Ama Dablam from the trail to the Kongma La.**



**Self portrait, hiking on the trail to the Kongma La, with Ama Dablam in the background.**



**Ama Dablam from the trail to the Kongma La.**



**Ama Dablam from the trail to the Kongma La.**



**Ama Dablam from the trail to the Kongma La.**



**View along the trail to the Kongma La.**



**Ama Dablam from the trail to the Kongma La.**



**View along the trail to the Kongma La.**



**View along the trail to the Kongma La.**



**Ama Dablam reflected in a lake near the Kongma La.**



**Ama Dablam reflected in a lake near the Kongma La.**



**Ama Dablam reflected in a lake near the Kongma La.**



**Ama Dablam reflected in a lake near the Kongma La.**



**View from the highest lake near the top of the Kongma La.**



**View from near the top of the Kongma La (5535m/ 18,159 ft).**



**View from near the top of the Kongma La (5535m/ 18,159 ft).**



**Ama Dablam reflected in a lake near the Kongma La.**



**View from the top of the Kongma La (5535m/ 18,159 ft).**