

Trek
in
Pakistan

I. The Karakoram: Baltoro and Gondogoro La

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The Karakoram



Uli Biaho Tower, 6109m, is one of the landmarks on the north side of the Baltoro Glacier



Mount Pajju, 6610m, rises some 3000m from the terminal moraine of the Baltoro Glacier and is typical of the iconic mountains along the north side of this glacier.



Trango (Namless) Tower, 6239m, is a granite spire rising 1000m proud of its ridge.

The Trek from Askole up the Baltoro Glacier to Concordia and then over the Gongogoro la Pass (circa 5480m) is considered to be one of the best in the world - and with good reason. It takes you past some of the most spectacular and famous mountains in the world. However, there is very little culture encountered as it is all above 3000m.

The trek starts from Skardu town and the best way to get here is fly from Islamabad, which avoids the 20 hour drive. This trek goes through a restricted area and as such permits, guides and porters are compulsory and these must be arranged before setting off from Skardu. Alternatively there are fixed-departure date expeditions setting off from Skardu regularly and it should be possible to book a place on these treks with short notice. Your guide will arrange the jeep for the 6-8 hour journey from Skardu to Askole and Hushe to Skardu, the permits, porter insurance, etc. The minimum time for the trek is 11 days but 15 would be better (excluding the jeep).

The best season is very late June to early September, with early August being optimal. Any earlier and the Gondogoro la will be deep in snow and any later the pass will be icy and dangerous, as crevasses appear and rockfall is more common. The weather is somewhat affected by the monsoon, so July and August can have spells of poor weather between longer periods of good weather.

From Askole onwards the only accommodation is camping. However, at Hushe there is hotel. Camping is rudimentary and the sparse facilities are dirty. Often the tent has to be placed on icy gravel on the glacier. All the food has to be taken from Skardu as nothing is available afterwards.

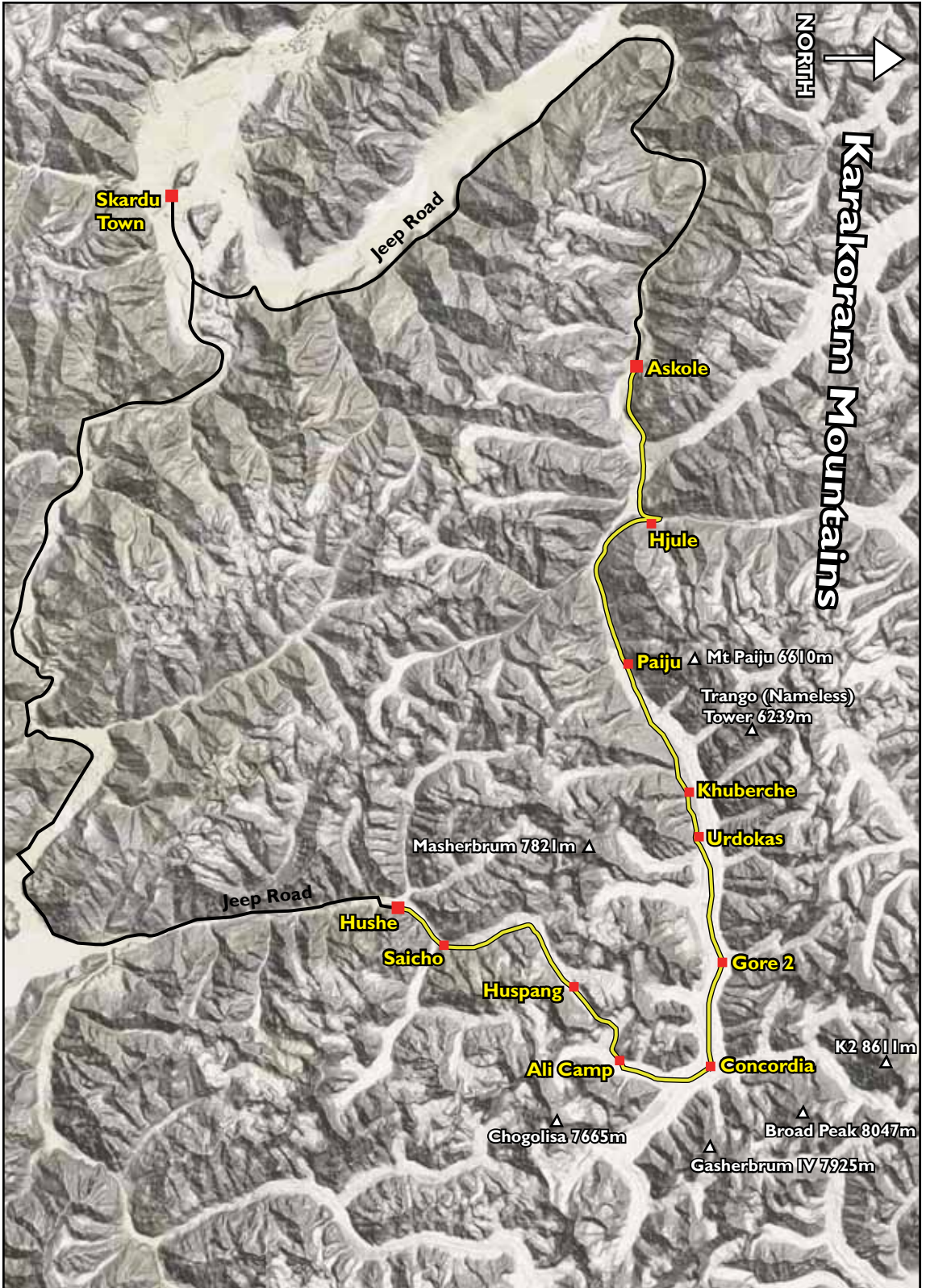
There are only poor 1:200,000 maps of the area by Leomann and an out of print Lonely Planet "Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindu Kush" book which may be available 2nd hand. ISBN: 9781740590860. However, there are numerous accounts online for further guidance.



The town of Skardu lies beside the Indus River on a vast flood plain covered in sand and popular trees. It is the starting point of any journey in the Eastern Karakoram. A day or two needs to be spent in Skardu to obtain permits, before embarking on the day-long jeep journey up the track to Askole.



Day 4. Mt Paiju, 6610m, seen from Khuberche camp in the early morning. Mt Paiju rises up more than 3000m from the Baltoro Glacier in a series of granite cliffs which buttress the main summit, which is covered in ice formations.



Map of the route up the Baltoro Glacier and over the Gongogoro La Pass (between Ali Camp and Huspang) from Askole to Hushe. For ease of fitting the map is not aligned to the north and the west is uppermost. To view in a correct alignment rotate the page anticlockwise 90 degrees in Adobe Acrobat.



Day 4. The Trango group comprises a series of granite towers and buttresses. There are 4 main towers or mountains to the group. From the left the first snow clad mountain is Trango II, 6327m, then the smaller spire of Trango Monk. In the middle of the picture is the Trango or Nameless Tower, 6239m. On the right is Great Trango, 6286m, which hosts the tallest near vertical cliffs in the world at 1340m.



Day 4. On the right is the 6109m Uli Biaho Tower spire of granite which sits across the Trango Glacier from the Trango Group in the top photo. It has been climbed, in 1979, but the 6417m Uli Biaho Peak, seen on the very left of the photo, behind the near mountains, remained unclimbed in 2006.



Day 1. The villages of Askole (near) and Korphe (distant) are separated by the raging slit-laden glacial torrent of the Braldu River, which has carved a deep gorge in the old moraine. This gorge is now bridged.



Day 2. The first two days trek are up beside the raging Braldu River, with the occasional glimpse to the large 6000m mountains further up the valley. Here just appearing out of the clouds in the middle is the Baltoro Cathedral, 5866m.



Day 3. Great Trango seen from near Paiju. This huge tower at 6286m, and its subsidiary to the right called Trango Pulpit, host 1340m cliffs, the highest in the world. They are on the other (east) side.



Day 3. The portal of the Baltoro Glacier is enormous with the huge Braldu River bursting forth from under its thick moraine-covered ice which is perhaps 100m thick here.



Day 3. Walking up the moraine of the Baltoro Glacier with Great Trango in the photo's centre and Trango (AKA Nameless) Tower to the right of it.



Day 4. Looking up the Mandu Glacier towards the Masherbrum Massif, which is obscured by clouds. This massive glacier is just one of about 20 side glaciers which feed the huge Baltoro Glacier.



Day 4. Trango (AKA Nameless) Tower, 6239m, seen from near Kuberche Camp. On the left hand side of the photo is the east face of Great Trango and part of the worlds highest cliffs.



Day 4. Trango Castle, 5753m, is the most southerly of the Trango Group and rises straight up from the Baltoro Glacier. Great Trango is hidden behind its ramparts from this angle.



Day 6. K2, 8611m, is the second highest mountain in the world. It lies at the just to the north of Concordia at the top of the Baltoro Glacier. It rises a full 4 km above Concordia. The usual ascent route is the Abruzzi Spur, which is the right-hand ridge from base camp on the Goodwin-Austin Glacier.



Day 4. Baltoro Cathedral, 5866m rises from the Baltoro Glacier to the east of Trango Castle, 5753m, and to the west of Lobsang Spire, 5707m. It is separated from them by the Dunge and Biale Glaciers respectively.



Day 6. The head of the Baltoro Glacier above Concordia, where the glaciers meet, is dominated by the soaring Gasherbrum IV which is a very difficult peak at 7925m. First climbed by Bonatti and Mauri in 1958 and seldom repeated.



Day 7. Mitre peak is another of the array of spectacular peaks surrounding Concordia. This peak at 6010m is dwarfed by its lofty neighbours 4 of which are 2km higher!



Day 8. At Concordia The Baltoro Glacier splits into The Goodwin-Austin, The Upper Baltoro and the The Vigne Galciers and there are many streams running on the glaciers surfaces



Day 8. Up The Vigne Glacier is the 7665m Chogolisa. These are just the north western ramparts and the main summit is 1000m higher behind these subsidiary peaks.



Day 8. Looking up the West Vigne Glacier, a branch of the Vigne Glacier, towards the Gondogoro La Pass, 5480m. The pass is to the left of centre.



Day 8. On the route from Concordia to Ali Camp the massive bulk of K2 rises above the cloud. It is so big the classic silhouette of the Matterhorn would only rise a third of the way up the K2 in this photo and would be entirely hidden behind the lower cloud in the centre right.



Day 9. The Gondogoro La Pass, 5480m, was only crossed by trekking parties for the first time in the mid 1980's. It is a steep, 40° slope, 500m high, with fixed ropes on this north ascent side, and the slightly steeper, south descent side. Crampons and harness are desirable, however the hardy Balti porters just use old socks over their simple shoes which adhere to the snow and ice as a substitute.



Day 9. Gondogoro La Pass at 5480m offers great views over the surrounding mountains. Here is the view over to the Gasherbrums. G VI, 7925m, is on the left, G I, 8080m, is in the centre right and G II, 8035m, is between them.



Day 9. The descent from the Gondogoro La is steep and is just visible in the background. However, after a week on the moraine of the Baltoro Glacier the arrival at the flower-filled oasis at Huspang is a delight.



Day 9. *Aster himalaicus* are common from 3500-5000m throughout the Karakoram. They are short robust plants and are often found in rocky locations as well as in meadows.



Day 9. *Rhodiola heterodonta*, a Roseroot species, is a succulent, storing water in leaves. They are monoecious with males and females on separate plants. Found in stony slopes from 4-5000m.



Day 10. After Huspang the route crosses the Gondogoro Glacier and passes the huge icefall shown above which flows down the south flank of the central part of the Masherbrum Range.



Day 10. *Rhodiola tibetica* very similar to *Rhodiola heterodonta* above and found in the same habitat. The two species are often side by side in the same meadows. Both these were at Huspang.



Day 9. On the lower part of the descent from Gondogoro La Pass, the gradient eases considerably and one can enjoy the fine views down the Gondogoro La Glacier and the remarkable Laila Peak, 6096m. Huspang is by the green oasis to the right of the main glacier.



Day 9. Looking back up the Gondogoro Glacier to the Gondogoro La. The pass is situated at the top of the steep slope rising up on the left of the photo, (just behind the very left buttress). As the day warms up rocks are released from the snow and ice slopes and it is imperative to pass this area before 1000hrs.



Day 10. Walking down the top of the east lateral moraine of the Gondogoro La Glacier with the the 6000m mountains on a south ridge coming off the extensive Masherbrum Range looming across on the other side of the moraine covered glacier.



Day 10. *Potentilla dryadanthoides* is a common plant found throughout the trek. It is quite prostrate and clings to the ground rather forming erect bushes. It is found on stony places in the dry subalpine zone between 3,500 – 5000 m.



Day 10. *Geranium himalayense* is a rhizomous carpet forming plant with blue flowers in July-Aug. It is common in the Karakoram, where it is found from 3500-4800m, especially in moist meadows.



Day 10. *Acantholimon lycopodioides* is a densely tufted shrub with small purple flowers in July-Aug. They are common on rocky slopes, often in colonies, from 2500-3000 in the Karakoram



Day 11. From Saicho Camp it is an short walk down to the confluence of the silty torrents from the Gondogoro and Charakusa Glaciers with good views to the 7000m peaks of K6 and K7.



Day 11. Just before Hushe village the silty torrent is joined by the river which flows from the Masherbrum Glacier creating a wide flood plain covered with a pine, juniper and tamarisk forest.

The Karakoram: Baltoro and Gondogoro La

Day	Start	Finish	Km	Up	Down	Time	General
1	Askole	Hjule	20	380	280	7	Head east from Askole, 3050m, on the track under the cliff face on the north side of raging Braldu river. After 4km leave the track and continue along the north side of the river on a path, climbing over a steep spur and after a further 3km reach the large Biafo river. Cross this raging torrent and stroll over pleasant sandy moraine then undulating moraine for 5km to reach Korophon. To the north is the mighty Biafo Glacier buried in moraine and all around are lofty 5000m mountains. The path now follows the north side of valley for a further 4km while keeping close to the slit laden Braldu River. It crosses a few rocky spurs and then enters a side valley where the path has been hacked into the sheer rock face. Continue north up this side valley for 3km with the large tributary of the fast flowing Dumordo river raging beside you and snow clad 6000m mountains ahead until you reach a bridge. Cross the river here and then double back south for a km to reach the official campsite at Hjule.
2	Hjule	Paiju	20	510	270	7	Leave Hjule and head down the east side of the Dumordo torrent for 2km to reach the Braldu River. Follow the north bank on terraces above the river or along its bank for 8km to reach the army outpost at Bardumal. These 8km are very scenic with towering mountains looming above the wide flat valley. Across the valley from Bardumal the glacial torrent of Ching Kang bursts out of a steep valley to the south. A km further is a small stone shelter. The path now crosses flattish moraine for the next 6km which has flowed down from the glaciers on Mt Paiju, while ahead sharp 6000m mountains start to unfold. The path descends down the moraine fan and meets the river again before climbing up a spur. There is a bridge here to the south side of the river, but we continue on the north for another 3km to reach the official camp at Paiju. The camp sits above a lake of boulders with the braided river flowing across it. To the east is the first view of the Baltoro Glacier and a teasing glimpse of the Trango Towers.
3	Paiju	Khuberche	17	610	190	6.5	Leave Paiju and head north of the braided river as it flows across the lake of boulders. After 3km you reach the huge Baltoro Glacier portal from where the torrent emerges. The path now climbs onto the glacier, buried under vast deposits of moraine. For the next 9km the path follows a tortuous route across the glacier crossing from the north side to the south across an ocean of boulders. It is a strenuous and hot trek across the furnace of the Baltoro Glacier. The consolation is the fantastic scenery not least the icy Mt Paiju, 6610m, and the towers of the Trango Group, especially Trango (Nameless) Tower behind the knife edge of Great Trango. At last after 3 hours on the hot moraine the path leaves the glacier at Liligo. Rest here before another 2 hour, 5km, stint on the hot glacier across more moraine brings you to Khuberche, where there are camp sites. Across the valley are the impressive 5700-5800m massifs of Trango Castle, Baltoro Cathedral and Lopsang Spire, each separated by a deep glacier
4	Khuberche	Urdokas	7	360	130	2.5	Leave Khuberche and head back onto the lateral moraine of the Baltoro Glacier. The next 7km are as tiring as the rocky path undulates up and down for a good half hour before the lateral moraine has been destroyed by a side glacier. Cross the bare ice of this side glacier and then climb to the lateral moraine of the Baltoro again. Across the valley Great Trango and Cathedral Peak dominate separated by the deep Dunje Glacier, while Mt Paiju and Uli Baijo Tower impressive to the west. Round another steep spur descending from the south to cross another smaller glacier tumbling down between granite peaks. Cross its icy jumble at the junction with the Baltoro and gain the latter's lateral moraine again to round another spur. From the shoulder of the spur the giants of Broad Peak and Gasherbrum IV come into view. Urdokas camp, at 4000m, is just another km across more moraine. From the camp there is a superb view across the Baltoro to Lopsang Spire and the enormous Muztagh Tower beyond that.
5	Urdokas	Goro 2	19	450	230	5	Walk past the boulders and the army camp along the edge of the lateral moraine and then descend down on to glacier itself. The task now is to almost cross the 2km wide glacier which is strewn with boulders and rocks, which in turn clog up the crevasses. The path is difficult to follow as it changes with the terrain, but after an hour you will reach the northern half, having woven across icy hillocks and crossed a few streams. The route now heads east for a good 11km along the glacier weaving across the gravel covered icy hillocks until the huge Masherbrum Glacier joins the Baltoro just before Biange Goro, where there is a splendid view into this Masherbrum Massif. Finally walk another 5km on the north side of a line of huge white ice blocks sitting on the stony surface of the Baltoro to reach Goro 2 to camp on the gravel on the ice. The spire of Gasherbrum IV dominates the exciting landscape ahead at Concordia.
6	Goro 2	Concordia	13	410	150	5.5	From the camp on the moraine continue up the glacier in much the same vein as yesterday. The moraine becomes smaller and the ice hillocks smoother as you ascend. There are further glaciers feeding the main Baltoro as you head eastwards and further lines of white ice blocks sitting on the grey moraine. The mountains become more and more spectacular with the giants of Gasherbrum IV and Broad Peak dominating but the knife edged spire of Mitre Peak impresses to the south. After passing a rustic army camp on the glacier the route continues for another 3km to the large gravel covered icy expanse of Concordia at about 4500m. As you reach this amphitheatre of some of the worlds most impressive mountains, the Queen of the Karakoram, K2 itself, unfolds from behind Marble Peak.

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Day	Start	Finish	Km	Up	Down	Time	General
7	Concordia Rest Day	Concordia Rest Day	0	0	0	0	This day is set aside for acclimitization and exploration of this tremendous area. You are just a few km away from the base of no less than 4 of the world's 8000m mountains, including K2, and numerous 6000m peaks. Perhaps the best way to spend the day is to wander up the moraine of the Goodwin Austin Glacier for 8km to the Basecamp of Broad Peak, where the view of K2 and the Abruzzi Ridge is at its best. It is not that necessary to walk the additional 8km to K2 Basecamp as the mountain is right above you and cannot be appreciated in its full glory and it is a long 32km day, including the return leg.
8	Concordia	Ali Camp	14	420	90	5.5	Leave Concordia, turn your back on the awesome K2 and descend down to the stream flowing over the ice, cross it and an ice ridge to gain easy moraine hillocks. Head for the east buttress of Mitre Peak, where the Vigne and Upper Baltoro Glaciers split. Walk up the moraine of the Vigne for 4km to the bare blue ice of the glacier and follow it for 2km until it crosses a glacial stream. From here follow the easy bare smooth surface of the glacier for 4km until a moraine ridge forms in the middle of the glacier. Continue up the moraine ridge for a further 3km until it veers west. Now cross the snow covered glacier, which will be soft and arduous after 1030. After a long km across this crevassed glacier arrive on the west side at Ali Camp which lies at about 4800m under a stack of unstable rock. Right across the valley is the fluted ramparts of Chogolisa which rise to well over 7000m. If the weather is good it will be worthwhile to walk 2km up the valley to see Gondogoro La Pass as it will be dark the next time you walk here. This difficult pass is across on the south side of the valley and is the first of two 40°-45° ramps. At Ali Camp prepare for a very early start
9	Ali Camp	Huspang	14	650	910	8.5	It is necessary to leave Ali Camp at midnight to complete this arduous day as rock fall on the descent occurs when the day heats up. Follow the west side of Vigne Glacier round a spur, then follow stone cairns and marker flags across to the south side of this glacier and the start of the climb. The climb is about 500m in all with the first third on easy slopes. The next third is demanding 40° slopes on fixed ropes and the last third is easier again, but is exhausting. By the time you reach the Gondogoro Pass, about 5480m, it will be light and there are great views to K2, Broad Peak, many of the Gasherbrums, and the summit of Masherbrum in the other direction. However all is not over, as there is a long 40°-45° icy slope to descend on a patchwork of fixed ropes. The arduous descent goes down the long icy snowfield and then crosses bands of scree and snow, before after almost 3 hard hours it reaches the lateral moraine of the Gondogoro Glacier. Follow the glaciers lateral moraine down for 4km to reach a flower filled pasture at Huspang, 4590m, by streams for a well earned rest under the gaze of the sharp Laila Peak.
10	Huspang	Saicho	18	50	1170	6.5	Where the stream leaves the basin at Huspang there is a path which leads off to the south across the moraine topped Gondogoro Glacier. Keep heading diagonally down the glacier until you reach bare ice. Follow the ice down for 4 km until under Laila Peak when the ice gets squeezed between moraine ridges. Follow this ridge down for a couple of km until the Gondogoro Glacier meets with the huge ice fall coming off the Masherbrum Peaks. Now climb up on the lateral moraine of the merged glaciers and veer south down its apex. Soon come to some flower filled meadows at Dalsamgpa. The route continues south now for the next 4km keeping on the lateral moraine or in the pleasant valley formed beside it and the main mountains. Soon you have to cross a heavily eroded ravine and an exposed mountain buttress before the main lateral moraine is gained again. The final 6km are down the apex of lateral moraine or in the pastoral valley to the east of it. The route descends on the wooded and rose-clad apex of the moraine to the well sited Saicho camp at the confluence of two glacial torrents.
11	Saicho	Hushe	12	50	260	3.5	From the lovely campsite at Saicho head downstream for a km until you get to a rustic cantilever bridge over the glacial torrent. Cross the bridge to the south just before the equal glacial torrent from the Gondogoro Glacier joins it. Now begin a very pleasant 5km saunter through dry shrubby country of small cedars, pines, junipers, tamarisk and rose bushes on the south side of the Hushe river passing the occasional shepherd's enclosure. After the easy stroll reach another rivers confluence where the meltwaters from the Masherbrum and Alling Glaciers both meet the Hushe River to form a powerful silt-laden torrent. The easy path now veers south between serrated snow clad peaks for another 4km through more dry rose and cedar shrub to reach the north end of Hushe. Climb the village wall and the wander through wheat fields and outbuildings for 2km to reach the edge of the small town and the excited welcoming committee of children. There is a comfortable hotel at Hushe, 3200m, to wash off the last fortnights dust.
			154	3890	3680	57.5	