

Vertigo

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Reflected in Kongde Lake, Mount Everest rears up behind the Nuptse Wall.
This view requires getting off the beaten trek in Khumbu. [More here](#)

Trip Reports

Khumbu: Beyond the 'cattle route'

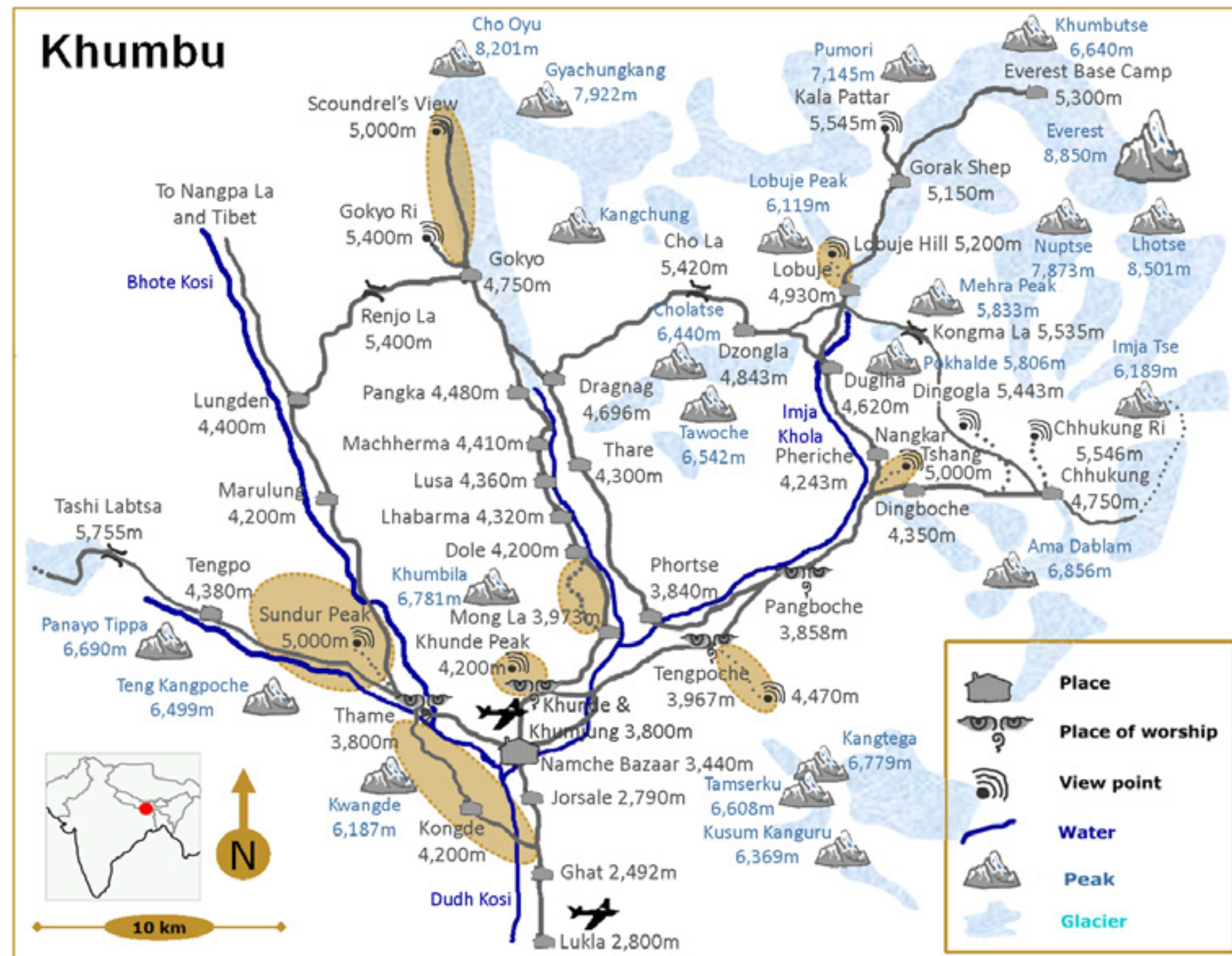
Words and pictures Peter Laurenson

Most people, even those who don't normally go into the hills, have heard about the Everest Base Camp trek in Nepal. I've quite often heard people say "Oh yeah, that's on my bucket list. I'd love to get to Base Camp one day." My first visit to Khumbu, the region on the south side of Everest, was in 1988. That year about 266,000 tourists visited Nepal and about 5% of them visited Khumbu, including me. I've since been into Khumbu six times, most recently in December 2017, when I was one of 940,000 tourists to Nepal. The 5% rule for Khumbu seems to still hold, because about 45,000 went to Khumbu in 2017 - four and half times more than on my first visit. Here's a sobering stat - Nepal is targetting 2 million tourists by 2020. 5% of 2 million is 100,000.

The good news is firstly, that the Nepalese are slowly getting better at managing their tourists and the impact they have on the environment. Up in Khumbu genuine efforts are in play to manage waste and operate more sustainably. And secondly, there's a lot more scope to Khumbu than just what I call the 'cattle route' to Everest Base Camp - a trip I these days avoid like the plague during the main trekking seasons of Sep/Oct/Nov and Mar/Apr/May.

The map here is one I've been filling out as I visit more spots around Khumbu. While I can't lay claim to hardly any of the peaks shown (only Pokhalde and Imja Tse), I have been on all the routes and to all the places and viewpoints shown (except Tashi Labsta). And the tan shaded spots are what I call 'off the beaten trek' places.

Khumbu is essentially five valley systems. Going from left (west), the first is the one between Namche Bazaar (the main town in the Khumbu) and Tashi Labsta. The second follows the Bhote Kosi River up from Thame to Nangpa La. The third follows the upper Dudh Kosi River up to Cho Oyu. The fourth is the cattle route from Namche Bazaar, tracing the Imja Khola River and then Khumbu Glacier to Everest Base Camp. And the fifth goes from Dingboche up to Imja Tse (Island Peak).



Linking the valleys are three high passes. Renjo La goes from Valley 2 to 3, Cho La from Valley 3 to 4 and Kongma La from Valley 4 to 5. Or of course you can go in the opposite direction as well. If you have about three weeks, doing what has become known as the 'Three Passes Trek' is probably one of the best routes on offer. You'll meet much fewer other trekkers and the scenery is world class.

But it's helpful to understand that, while you'll probably spend most of your time in Khumbu above 4,000 metres, it's still relatively highly populated with small villages and a great tea house network. It's amazing just how many trails there are and how high you can get on them - all over Khumbu. That's what the tan shaded spots are about and what the following images give you a taste of.

So, if the Everest trek is on your bucket list, this is helpful food for thought - there's so much more to Khumbu than the 'cattle route'. See many more Khumbu images and information at www.occasionalclimber.co.nz

One man who can lay claim to some of the high peaks in Khumbu is Steve Fortune. Last year he put up a new route on the SW Pillar of Lobuje East (upper centre on the map). At our June Section night (Wed 27th) he'll take us through this. I can't wait.



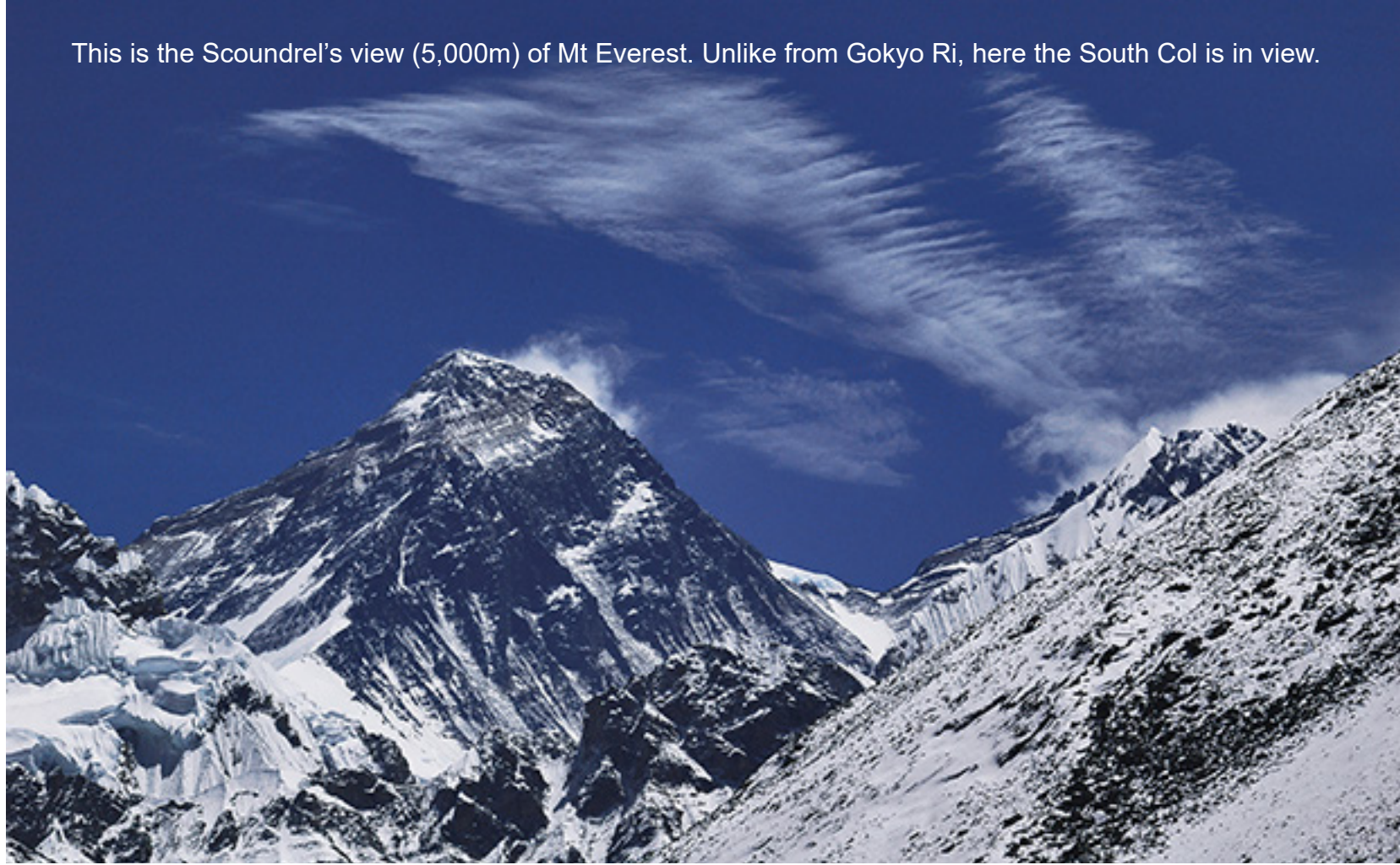


Above, the view from the ridge just beneath Khunde Peak (4,200m). In the valley on the left sits Khunde and Khumjung. Directly above is Ama Dablam, with Kantega and Tamserku nearer centre. Kwangde is far right .

Below is Khumbila on the left skyline. In the foreground is the steepest of three ridge crossings on the local's high route between Mong La and Dole. Cho Oyu is in the distance on the right. The inset is a view about 300 metres above Mong La (bottom right), with Phortse across the valley and, from left - the peaks of Cholatse, Ama Dablam, Kangtega and Tamserku.



This is the Scoundrel's view (5,000m) of Mt Everest. Unlike from Gokyo Ri, here the South Col is in view.



This is a view of Makalu from Nangkar Tshang (5,000m), above Dingboche.



And below is the view from Lobuje Hill (5,200m), looking back down the Khumbu Glacier to Ama Dablam (centre left) and Tawoche and Cholatse (right). Lobuje is bottom left and Kongma La and Pokharklde are on the left skyline.





Above is an icy section on the trail between Thame and Kongde.



Above is the view above Kongde (bottom right) across to Namche Bazaar, Khunde, Phortse, Tengpoche and the Everest Group (middle skyline).



This is the view from 5,000m on Sundur Peak, above Thame. The next section is steeper than it looks here, requiring rock climbing skills. The valley stretching left leads to Nangpa La. The ridge that Renjo La crosses is in the centre. For more Khumbu images and information www.occasionalclimber.co.nz