

3·7 Ascent of Kala Pattar

Kala Pattar (5545 m/18,190 ft) is not a separate mountain, but a prominent peak on the south ridge of the mountain Pumori (7165 m/23,505 ft). Don't be deceived by the modest aspect that it presents from Gorak Shep. It's a steep, tiring ascent at high altitude, and its summit section involves some boulder-hopping and scrambling. Take plenty of water, and ensure it does not freeze, and take also warm clothing so you can linger long enough to enjoy the legendary summit views

From Gorak Shep, the climb involves an altitude gain of 405 m/1330 ft, and takes about 3-4 hours for the round trip, plus time on the summit.

Starting the ascent, Pumori ahead



Start by crossing the dry lake and go up the other side on sandy switchbacks. There are two obvious routes: the left one goes directly up the spur, and may be preferable after recent snowfall, but the slightly less steep one to the right is generally used.

It begins as a sandy path with steep switchbacks that demand a slow pace. After a while, the gradient eases and there's a wonderful middle section which traverses the hillside with ever-finer views opening up.

Then the route becomes steeper again, with a sting in its tail. The final scramble to the cairn with prayer flags demands a fresh surge of energy. The summit area is tiny, so depending on how many others are competing for space, you can move to the small plateau just below, where movement is easier and the view just as good.

And what a view! This mountain panorama may be the highlight of your entire trip, encompassing (from north to east) Pumori, Changtse, Khumbutse and mighty Everest itself, with the West Ridge standing proud to the left of its summit, looking like another peak. You can identify the Khumbu Icefall, Base Camp and the South Col. This is the closest view of Everest accessible to trekkers, as opposed to mountaineers.



The unexpected star of the show is Nuptse, to the east, which appears taller than Everest despite being 970 m lower: see pages 36-7. This illusion is caused by Everest's summit being nearly twice as far away as Nuptse's. Nuptse looks stunningly beautiful, with its fluted shoulders and shapely peak: see our title page photo, taken from here.

Left to right: Changtse, Everest West Ridge and summit, shoulder of Nuptse



Summit cairn, Kala Pattar