

## Info on Gondoro La

### Equipment

- If you want to play it safe take along a harness and carabiners, so you can attach yourself to the ropes that are fixed along the steep sections of the pass. That way you will not encounter problems with the very steep parts of the trail.
- A helmet is strongly suggested. You can buy or rent one in Skardu.
- An ice axe is not absolutely necessary, but a good idea.
- You will not need a rope, since there are fixed ropes in all steep sections of the trail.
- Crampons are a must, but you only need them for walking on snow, so simple ones will do. Gondoro La is not about mountaineering.
- Your tent does not have to be top class, but it has to be sturdy and able to withstand very strong winds. Cuppola style tents are the best option.
- A self-inflating ThermoRest should do, but remember you will be sleeping on solid ice for a couple of days. You should shield the mat with one of those thin aluminium foils used to keep injured people warm.
- A three-season down sleeping bag is good up to Concordia (presuming that you do not sleep lightly dressed). To cross Gondoro La you will need extra equipment. If you have the possibility of taking along another down sleeping bag as an extra layer, absolutely do it.
- A down jacket will serve you good. Temperatures at Ali Camp can drop as far as minus 20 degrees Celsius. You will be able to last longer on the top of the pass if you wear a down jacket.

### Porters/Guides

- The porters usually do walk far ahead of the clients, but offer assistance at difficult spots. They are used to high altitude walking and are very good at helping. Crossing the Gondoro La, however, is a challenge to them, too, so you cannot expect them to be of much help on this particular part of the trek. You can only hope that they have been well equipped by the agency, so not to put the group in any danger.
- Female trekkers will normally not be harassed by guides, but a difficult situation could arise. It all boils down to the trekking agency and the guides they employ. A reputable agency will employ guides on a long term basis and thus make sure that these incidents do not occur.

### Trail

- Other than at Concordia and Pajju you will not share the the camp sites with many other trekkers. There will be other trekkers around, but certainly not many.
- Both sides are secured with new ropes every year. In the highest camps on both sides of the pass are rescue teams that will accompany you to the top of the pass. Many members of these team are professional mountaineers.
- Walking time between the two highest camps (and crossing the pass) will take you between 12 to 15 hours as a total.

### Section Concordia - Ali Camp – Gondoro La

- The ascent from Ali Camp (an island of stones within the sea of glaciers) looks very intimidating, but is not as bad as it looks to be. Walking time from Ali Camp to the bottom of the pass takes a minimum of two hours. It takes anywhere between 3 and 6 hours to reach the pass from Ali Camp.
- Departing Ali Camp at 1 AM means that you have enough time for crossing the pass and do not need to rush it, although you will be hard pressed to make it to the top of the pass for the sun rise. The hardship is rewarded with fantastic sights from the top of the pass.
- The direction Concordia to Hushe is recommended because of the extremely steep slope on the Hushe side that is tougher going up than down.
- The ascent on the Concordia side involves a 50 degree slope with two flat resting places. Departing Ali Camp you walk along the glacier until you reach the pass. You leave camp very early (around 1 AM), because the snow gets soft around 10 am and you keep sinking into the snow.
- Gondoro La looks very dramatic from Ali Camp, but does not pose any technical problems. Temperature and fatigue are the only problems. You start off very relaxing. Then you ascent 200 metres over a rather steep firn field. Further up the trail winds around crevasses or with the help of ladders over crevasses. The firn field is secured with a fixed rope. Unless snow came down during the night you will find excellent steps hacked into the firn field. You will find crampons to be of

great help in this section (although the porters do not wear any crampons they are faster than their clients). Climbing is not required at any point.

### Section Gondoro La - Hushe

- The descent is a very steep (60 degree) slope. Depending on the season you will cross a long section of snow, firn or (rolling) stones. There will be a greater chance of snow at the beginning of the season (June) and you are very likely to walk over a loose scree towards the end of the season (August).
- The amount of snow and the quality of the snow (firn or ice) depends mainly on the weather situation.
- The descent over the scree slope (partly covered by ice) is terrible even with the fixed ropes. A helmet is essential to avoid being hit by falling rocks.
- The pass is very steep on the Hushe side (60 degrees) and long (500 altitude metres). It is one long steep slope without any resting spots and not for the faint-hearted. You will need a few hours to negotiate it. If it is covered with snow there is no danger of rock fall and allows for safe walking. If you approach the pass from the Hushe side the last 20 metres offer a breathtaking experience. You forget about all the hardship when the curtain is raised to reveal a spectacular and unforgettable sight.

### **Time / Weather**

- June and July are the best months. The mountains are white and look great for taking pictures. In August you will find most of the scenery to be greyish.
- Weather in the Karakoram is so unpredictable, you need to be prepared for all eventualities. If the weather turns foul around the Gondoro La, you could easily face minus 20 degrees Celsius.

### **Difficulties**

- Pakistani trekking agencies have the tendency to underrate the difficulty of the treks, so not to put off potential clients. Walking above 5000 metres is different from "just" going up to Concordia at roughly 4,500 metres.
- You can „easily“ go to Concordia via the Baltoro Glacier, if you are reasonably fit and have fairly good equipment. You can even „do“ the Gondoro La, if you can walk, but crossing the pass requires special equipment.
- Usually the porters are very helpful and will undertake every possible effort to get you through a trek. Getting up to the Gondoro La and down again is a completely different thing. Everybody will be busy taking care of themselves, because this is difficult terrain.

### **Acclimatization**

- You need to be fit and well acclimatized. If you are doing ok in Ali Camp you should be able to cross the pass.
- Doing the trek from Askole and including a rest day at Concordia should provide proper acclimatization for the Gondoro La.
- KE Adventure Travel are one of the very few companies that cross the Gondoro La via approach from Hushe and they have an unsurpassed success rate. In respect of proper acclimatization I would believe the Concordia approach to be more logical, but apparently the extreme scree slope on the Hushe side is safer accomplished ascending rather than descending it. KE Adventure Travel compensates the safety vs. acclimatization disadvantage by special acclimatization. Altitude sickness (AMS) should not appear that way.
- If serious AMS occurs with a client, the entire group will need to backtrack as long as they have not reached Gondoro La yet. None of the trekking agencies has the capabilities (neither equipment wise nor porter or guide wise) to split the group. The schedule usually allows for one or two extra (rest) days in case of slight AMS, in which case the entire group would pause.
- If you try to reach the pass from the Hushe side and fail to properly acclimatize you will totally miss the Concordia site.