

# CHOMO LONZO NORTH

*Alpine style on a difficult new route to a Tibetan summit.*

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PATRICE GLAIRON-RAPPAZ



Stéphane Benoist leaves the first bivouac site, with the west face of Chomo Lonzo Main (7,790m) looming behind.  
*Patrice Glairon-Rappaz*

**I** am lying in my tent, listening to some sweet music and daydreaming about our climbs on this amazing expedition. Tomorrow, we will start our journey back home after two months in this remote area. I close my eyes and let my mind drift back...



**F**or Stéphane Benoist and myself, the ascent of Chago, a beautiful, 6,893-meter summit between Everest and Makalu, provided the first intense experience of the expedition. We were both frozen by the time we reached the bergschrund. Really strong winds were hammering the summits around us that day.

“Let’s try to get over the bergschrund and then decide whether we go on,” Stéphane suggested.

A few hours later we were admiring the incredible views from Chago’s summit. We had climbed a very logical yet strenuous line up the northeast face and then followed an airy ridge-line to the top. We were surrounded by some of the Himalaya’s most prestigious peaks: Makalu, Baruntse, Ama Dablam, Nuptse, Lhotse, and the Kangshung side of Everest—better than anything we’d seen on postcards!

We felt strong and our enthusiasm seemed unbreakable. We had been successful on our first climb in the range, and I could feel the sweet, hard drug that runs in your blood anytime you reach a summit. We had worked hard to stand there, yet that test now made us more confident. A few minutes earlier we had been cursing and suffering from exhaustion, but soon we were feeling ready for an even harder climb. This surely had to be a drug, and a hard one too!



I hear a whistle outside the tent and crawl out to see our sirdar waving for me to come down to the main tent for lunch. We are all gathered at base camp except for “the Renegades”; they are still fighting high on the mountain. The last we’ve heard, they were on a pass and heading out to the main summit of Chomo Lonzo.

As we sit around and talk, we all agree that if they make the summit their ascent will surely go down as one of the most challenging and exposed routes yet climbed in the Himalaya. We all enjoy being able to share their climb “live” through the radio connection and to give them all the support we can!

Once lunch is over, I decide to return to my tent and open up Shackleton’s story where I’d last left off. Reading about his adventures makes my mind drift back to my own recent adventure....



The end of our stay was nearing and only windy and unstable weather was being forecast. Steph and I hadn’t even picked our definite line yet, and we were only 10 days from heading home! This was a new experience for us because on other expeditions we had decided on our objectives before leaving home and had been able to closely study the route. This time the approach was different because the mountain would be deciding for us, setting the rules of the game as we climbed. We were going to have to adapt and quickly pick what would seem the best option.

Finally, Steph and I decided on what looked like a really interesting line up the west face of Chomo Lonzo’s northern summit. On the night of our departure it snowed heavily and doubts again arose in our heads. They had been there the whole time, yet we had finally managed to quiet them down. And now it was snowing again. The weather forecast was unstable, and we could only imagine how we would be hammered by the spindrift that would now certainly be washing down the face.

Our alarms sounded at 3 a.m., and we were soon on our way, hiking up a boulderfield and then a low-angle slope to the bergschrund. Our packs were heavy and the ice was incredibly hard on the first part of the route. We didn’t yet realize it would stay this way throughout the entire climb! By 9 a.m. our calves were already on fire. We reached the gully after a delicate mixed pitch. A rather steep pitch with a vertical section led to the start of a beautiful ice line,



Just like a fun *goulotte* above Chamonix, only it's above 6,500 meters. *Patrice Glairon-Rappaz*

which we followed for 10 pitches up to 6,800 meters. It was 1:30 a.m. when we found a place to set up our bivouac on a shoulder. Ravaged by this long and painful day, we dove into our tent and fell into a deep sleep as soon as our heads touched the ground, forgetting all about food and water.

We woke late the next day and drank, drank, drank, and drank some more. We needed to rehydrate and feed ourselves if we hoped to keep going.

We started moving again around 1 p.m. We were climbing snow slopes now, which enabled our calves to finally rest a little. These slopes led to a series of exciting mixed pitches. It was eight in the evening when we decided to stop for the night. We put up our tent on a comfortable flat boulder that hung over the void. Ambience guaranteed! As strong winds picked up during that night, thoughts of being blown off that rock ran through our heads. But once again, gravity spared us.

I felt drowsy in the morning and knew I would have to gather every bit of energy remaining in my tired body to get out of there. Steph took the lead up to the summit ridge, which appeared much longer and more difficult than we'd hoped. He was in better shape, and I followed the rope he dragged up the snow slopes, around the crevasses, up and over seracs and rocky sections. It seemed like this ridge was never ending. It's hard to move fast when you're at 7,000 meters. We bivouacked for the third time 50 meters below the summit in a sheltered spot.

We slept well but I still felt totally drained. I will never forget what a nightmare the first pitch of that next day was for me. We had to break trail through very deep snow and felt like we were getting nowhere. My body wouldn't respond at all. I screamed from the top of my lungs to shake myself up. I had to reach deeper than I ever had for each step upward. This remains one of the toughest

moments I've experienced as an alpinist, and to this day it is still hard for me to analyze. I was full of strength, somewhere inside of me, but I had no access to it.

Soon, though, the snow on the ridge became more solid, and then we were standing on the beautiful northern summit of Chomo Lonzo. This was an indescribable moment of shared joy.

Our descent followed the northwest ridge that the Renegades had climbed a few weeks earlier, when they did the first ascent of the north summit. After a few rappels we met the three of them headed back up for their attempt on the central summit. Seeing them there felt both surreal and yet so warm. We spoke only a few words and exchanged friendly embraces. Patrick took pictures of us. They were happy for us, and we cheered them on for their ascent.

After a long series of rappels we reached the 6,000-meter high camp at around 10 p.m. We were on solid ground now.



Chance meeting, just below the summit of Chomo Lonzo North: From left, Patrice Glairon-Rappaz, Christian Trommsdorff, Stéphane Benoist, and Yannick Graziani. One team headed down, the other headed up. *Patrick Wagon*



I open my eyes slowly and see my book at my side. I am lying deep within my sleeping bag. Nothing wrong with a nice siesta, especially when you've had such sweet dreams!

#### SUMMARY:

AREA: Kangshung Valley, Tibet

ASCENTS: Ascent of Chago (6,893 meters) by the northeast face to the northwest ridge, Stéphane Benoist, Patrice Glairon-Rappaz, April 25, 2005. New route (1,100m, ED M5+ WI4-5) on the west face of Chomo Lonzo North (7,199 meters), Glairon-Rappaz, Benoist, May 13-16, 2005.

#### A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

*Patrice Glairon-Rappaz, 35, lives in southern France. His new route on the north face of Thalay Sagar with Stéphane Benoist was featured in the 2004 American Alpine Journal. He writes: "I would like to take this opportunity to thank Jean-Claude Marmier, president of the FFME Himalayan Committee, for his unlimited support."*

*Translated from the French by Caroline Ware.*