

An Expedition to the Singekang Valley

October – November 2010



Supported by:

The Mount Everest Foundation (MEF)

And

Mountaineering Ireland

**Members: Martin Boner, George Carlton, Sandra Kennedy, Alan Tees, Andrew Tees
and Jeremy Windsor**

For further information contact - jswindsor@doctors.org.uk

**We would like to thank Anindya Mukherjee, Thendup Sherpa and all those at
Adventuremania (www.adventuremania.com) for making this expedition possible.**

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Report Sent To:

Indian Mountaineering Foundation

Irish Mountaineering Club

Mountaineering Ireland

Mount Everest Foundation

Summary

In the autumn of 2011 six mountaineers Martin Boner (Ire), George Carlton (UK), Sandra Kennedy (UK), Alan Tees (UK), Andrew Tees (UK) and Jeremy Windsor (UK), together with members of Adventuremania left Delhi to explore the previously unvisited Singekang valley in the Spiti District of Himachal Pradesh.

From Delhi the team drove overnight by bus to Manali, then over the Rothang La (3800m) and Kumjung La (4551m) by 4x4 vehicles, before arriving in Kaza. After two days acclimatising and gathering further supplies, the journey continued east to Poh where the team crossed the Spiti river and camped at Pomrang, close to the entrance of the Singekang valley.

Three camps were established along the Singekang valley over the course of eight days. An unsuccessful attempt was made on Singekang, stopping just 400 metres from the summit largely as a result of unconsolidated snow, low temperatures and steep ice towers. However a successful first ascent of neighbouring Snaght Kang (5500m) was completed from the north.

Our exploration of the Singekang Valley not only led to a first ascent, but also identified a number of accessible peaks in the region and a potential crossing towards the east.

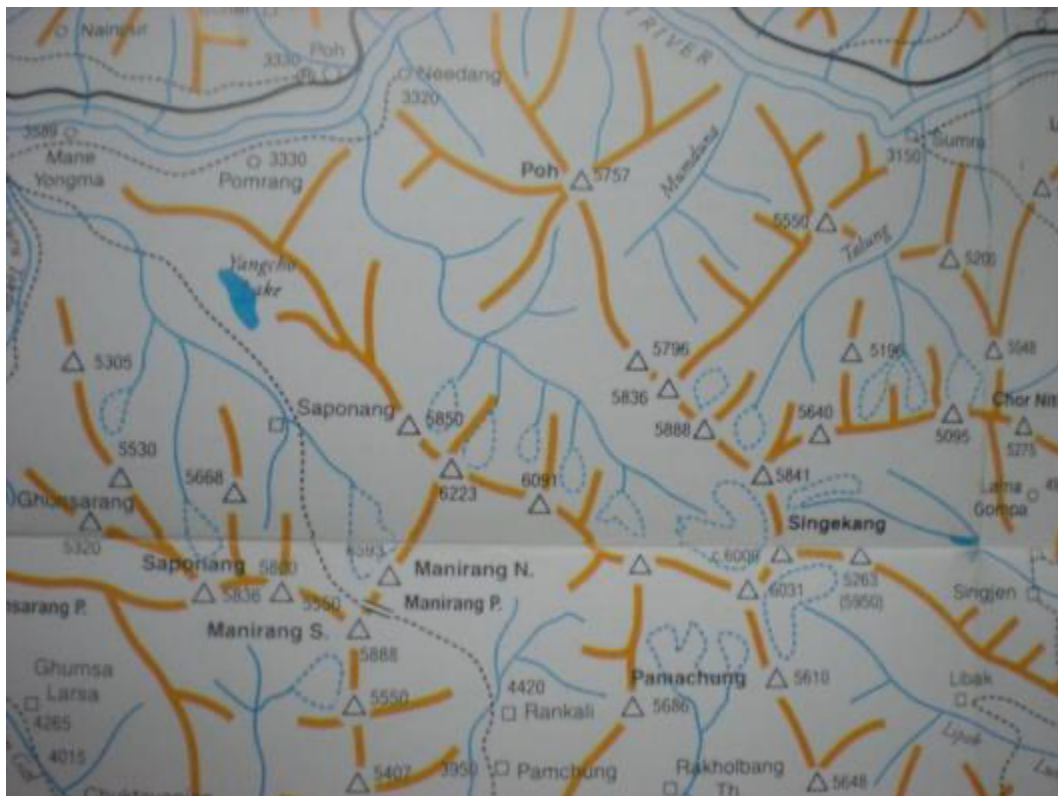
Without the generous assistance of the Mount Everest Foundation, Mountaineering Ireland, the Indian Mountaineering Federation and Adventuremania this expedition would not have been possible.

Introduction

Surely the gods live here? This is no place for men.

Rudyard Kipling

Despite extensive exploration, there still remain a number of unclimbed mountains in Spiti. One area, just to the east of Manirang (6593m) was chosen to be the site of our visit. Whilst no one had ventured into this area before, a number of previous visitors had given us enough information to know what to expect. The 1994 Indian British Expedition led by Harish Kapadia (see HJ 51 pp92-99) and Anindya Mukherjee's recent visits to the area provided us with firsthand accounts and a number of useful images. With these, we decided that our objective would be to explore the valley that stretched south east from Poh and from there make an attempt on the mountain that lay at its end – Singekang (6031m).



Map of the Singekang valley - Poh and Pomrang can be identified in the upper left hand corner. The valley can be seen running south east towards the summit of Singekang (6008m)

Administration

Our expedition was organised by Anindya Mukherjee Raja, Thendup Sherpa and the staff of Adventuremania.



Raja can be contacted at:

13/3 Sarat Chandra Atta Lane

Belur Math

Howrath – 711 202

West Bengal

India

Landlines: (+91) 33 2243 3954, (+91) 97487 61139 and (+91) 92305 11139

Fax: (+91) 33 2243 3954

Mobile: (+91) 94320 51488

Email: anindya.adventuremania@gmail.com

Itinerary

- 24/10. Assemble in Delhi
- 25/10. IMF briefing and overnight bus to Manali.
- 26/10. Rest day in Manali.
- 27/10. Drive to Kaja.
- 28/10. Rest day in Kaja. Visit to A monastery.
- 29/10. Drive to Pomrang and establishment of first camp.
- 30/10. First carry to Base Camp (BC).
- 31/10. Second carry to BC.
- 1/11. Third carry and occupation of BC.
- 2/11. Exploration and first carry to Advance Base Camp (ABC).
- 3/11. Second carry to ABC.
- 4/11. Third carry and occupation of ABC.
- 5/11. First carry to High Camp (HC).
- 6/11. Second carry and occupation of HC.
- 7/11. Rest day at HC.
- 8/11. Attempt on Singekang Peak.
- 9/11. Return to ABC.
- 10/11. Rest day at ABC.
- 11/11. Carry to high camp on Snaght Kang.
- 12/11. Climb Snaght Kang. Return ABC.
- 13/11. Descend from ABC to Pomrang.
- 14/11. Rest day at Pomrang
- 15/11. Drive to Spillow.
- 16/11. Drive to Shimla.
- 17/11. Rest day at Shimla.

18/11. Rest day at Shimla and overnight bus to Delhi.

19/11. IMF debriefing in Delhi

20/11. Flight home.

The Route to Singekang



Figure 1: Map of India

Singekang lies within Himachal Pradesh, a region that borders Tibet on the east and the Indian state of Kashmir and Jammu to the west. The journey from Delhi to Manali was completed by overnight bus. The journey took 16 hours. From Manali, the road continues north to the Rathang Pass (Figure 2). This area is very popular with Indian visitors intent on enjoying the novelty of a few hours in the snow. However on the day of our crossing, heavy snowfall had put most off! Unfortunately conditions meant that we sat gridlocked for most of the morning until the snows were eventually cleared by Indian soldiers.

From the Rathang La the road crossed into the Lahaul and Spiti district and descended east into the Spiti valley below. Before reaching Kaza the route climbs the Kumjung La. At 4551m this road is often covered in ice and snow. Our crossing was no exception! By mid November this crossing becomes too treacherous and access to Spiti is only possible from the east. Eventually we arrived in Kaza some fourteen hours after leaving Manali – we were relieved!

Kaza proved to be an ideal place to take a rest day. Not only were we able to pick up last minute supplies, but we were also able to visit the extraordinary monastery.

After a day spent in Kaza we continued east by road to Poh. On the way we made a memorable stop at the Dhanka Ghompa. From Poh we ferried supplies across the bridge and established a camp in Pomirang (Figure 4).



Figure 2: Crossing the Rathang La

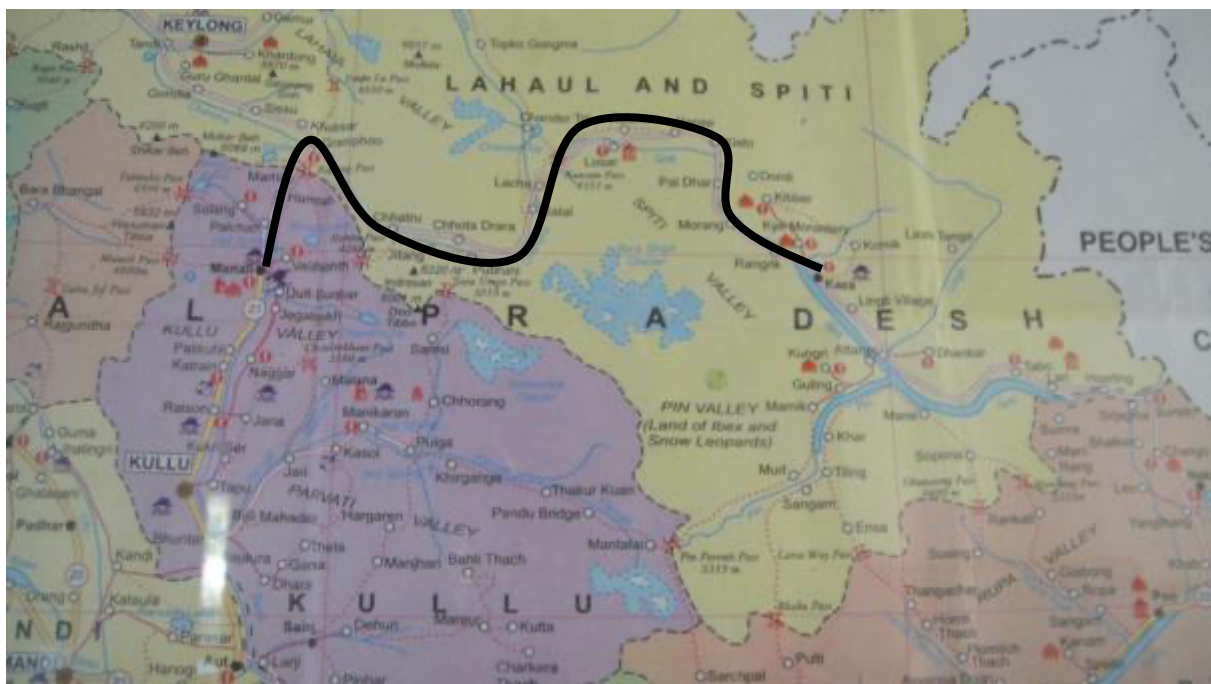


Figure 3: The journey from Manali to Kaza crosses both the Rathang La (3800m) and Kumjung La (4221m).

Pomirang proved to be the ideal base for an expedition into the Singekang valley. From here we were only a few hundred metres from the valley entrance and thanks to the kindness of the local villagers we were well supplied with firewood and apples!



Figure 5: The entrance to the Singekang valley.

With local help we were able to find a feint trail along the valley floor before finally climbing slopes on the north side of the stream. After 3-4 hours walk we were able to establish a Base Camp. Despite short sections of steep scree and at least three river crossings, the difficulties were easily negotiated (Figures 6 and 7).



Figure 6: Traversing the northern slopes of the Singekang valley



Figure 7: A typical river crossing in the Singekang valley

From BC our route we continued along the valley floor, however our progress was soon slowed by steep slopes and the debris of a recent landslide. Unfortunately further river crossings were impossible and we were forced to explore the many loose sandy gullies slicing the northern slopes. These were very steep, angled at more than 45 degrees and provided little in the way of security (Figures 8 and 9). Nevertheless we established a route up the straightest of the gullies and emerged on a large thorny shelf.



Figure 8: The steep gully that connects BC with ABC

From the top of the gully we were able to get our first clear views of a peak we subsequently named, “Lynam Peak” after the late Irish mountaineer Joss Lynam (Figure 9 and 10).



Figure 9: Lynam Peak (5796m)

The thorny ramp led into a bowl where we found the remains of a hut. This was to be the last evidence of human habitation (Figure 10). At this point the valley opened up again and we were able to establish our Advanced Base Camp (ABC) at a site close to the stream (Figure 11).



Figure 10: The last evidence of human habitation in the Singekang valley



Figure 11: ABC - looking back towards the thorny shelf and the steep gullies that lead to BC

From ABC our progress continued along the stream. At more than 4000m, much of this route was choked with ice and frozen scree. Eventually we emerged from the valley and found ourselves in a snowy bowl. The effect of the sun was dramatic – temperatures easily exceeded 30 degrees C and the intensity of the light was startling. Finally we were met with the first view of Singekang “Lion Peak” (Figure 12).



Figure 12: The snowy summit peak of Singekang can be seen immediately behind the triangular rock and snow pyramid of one of Singekang’s subsidiary peaks.

We continued towards Singekang and established our High Camp (HC) beside the foot of a subsidiary north western peak (Singekang Minor) that obscures much of Singekang (Figure 13). To the north, a series of interconnected peaks could be seen that eventually joined Lynam Peak. Meanwhile to the south the view was more complicated. Here, a long snowy ridge connected Singekang with Peak 5882m, Peak 6091m and Snaght Kang (5500m). Although not easily visible, Manirang, the tallest peak in Spiti, sat immediately behind these peaks (Figures 14, 15, 16 and 17).

Alan Tees has assembled an excellent photomontage of the view south from HC (Figure 18).



Figure 13: The view south east from HC



Figure 14: The snowy ridge that connects Singekang (left) to Peak 5882m (right)

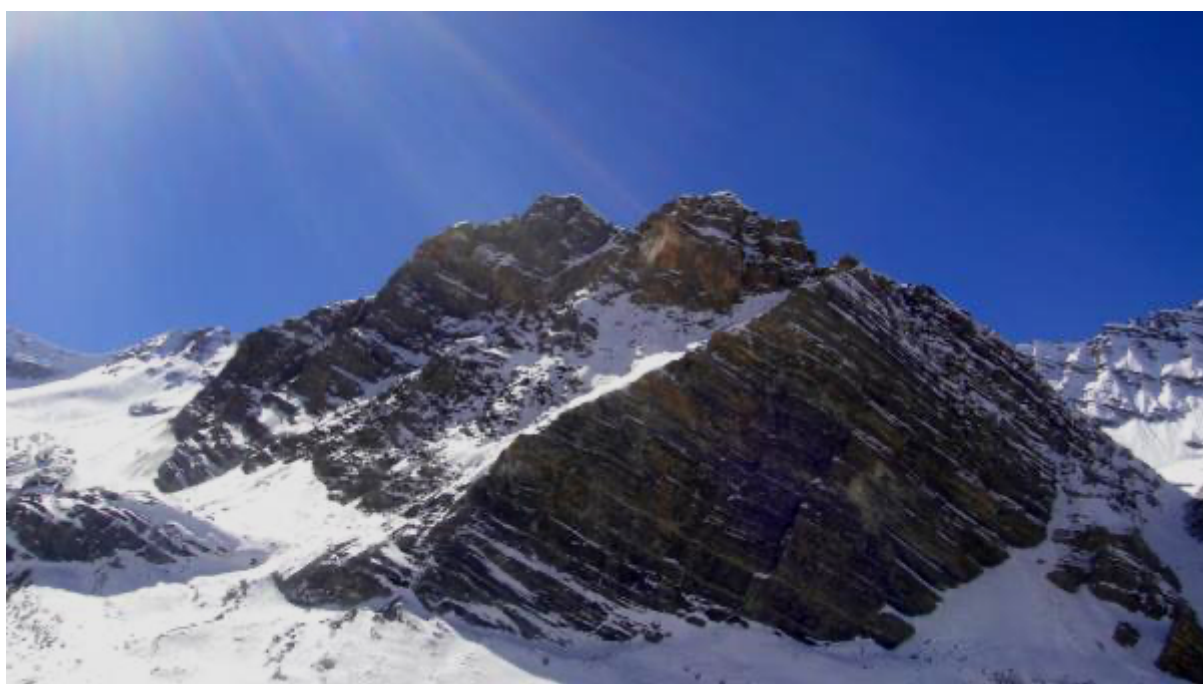


Figure 15: Peak 5882m was situated directly across from HC

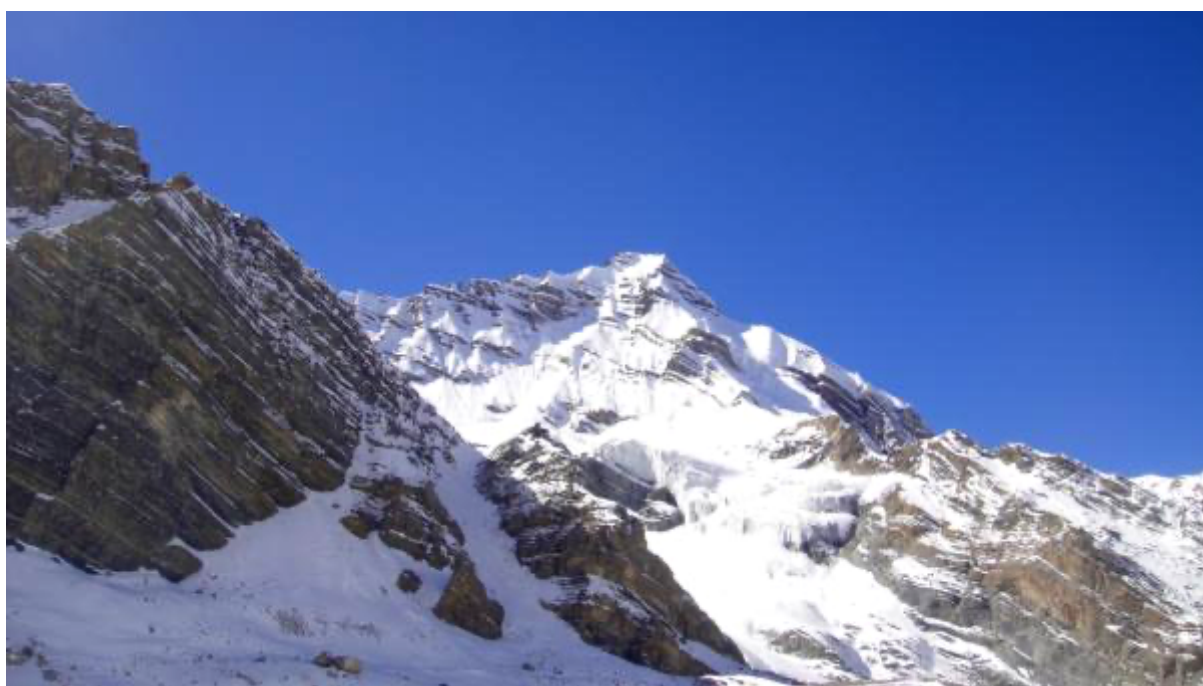


Figure 16: Peak 6091m



Figure 17: Peak 6091m on the left and Snaght Kang (5500m) on the right



Figure 18: The view south from HC. Courtesy of Alan Tees.

Climbing on Singekang and Snaght Kang



Figure 19: Route to Singekang. The black line marks the route from HC into the Singekang Cwm

On leaving HC we passed Singekang Minor to the west before turning sharply east into a narrow cwm (Figure 19 and 20). The head of the cwm was blocked by the Singekang Col. Beneath the Col, a large tooth of rock (Figures 20 and 21) marked the beginning of the first steep section of the route. Unfortunately, this was covered in loose scree and a fixed line needed to be put in place. Once on the Col it was possible to see over the peaks that had blocked our views to the south and west from HC. Finally, the east face of Manirang was now visible (Figure 22)! Looking over the other side of the Col towards the north it was possible to trace the continuation of the valley that we had followed all the way from Pomirang. This wide stream of snow and ice continued to rise gently before heading down towards the valleys of Tibet. Another excellent photomontage by Alan Tees illustrates this (Figure 23).

Turning east our chosen ridge started to unfold. Initially we had thought that it would be a straightforward climb to the summit however it was soon clear that this wasn't going to be the case (Figure 24 and 25)!



Figure 20: The Singekang Col emerging from the darkness during our summit attempt. The large tooth of rock is visible in the centre of the image



Figure 21: The large tooth of rock that stands beneath the Singekang Col



Figure 22: The descent from the Singekang Col with the large tooth of rock visible on the right. The swirling strata of Manirang's east face is visible in the background. Peak 5882m lies in front to the right.



Figure 23: Looking north from the Singekang Col it is possible to see the long northern ridge that connects Peak 5841m to Lynam Peak (above). Further to the east the Col continues towards the Tibetan border (below). Courtesy of Alan Tees.



Figure 24: The narrow western ridge of Singekang. Unfortunately, due to cornices, unconsolidated snow and loose rock the team were unable to climb it.

After descending to HC the team returned to ABC. From here the decision was made to attempt nearby Snaght Kang (5500m) (Figure 25).



Figure 25: The snow summit of Snaght Kang is visible on the left. Peak 6091m is in the background.

A high camp was established at 4800m on a platform carved out of the snow. This provided excellent views of Manirang. The ridge above was full of interest – several traverses were needed to avoid obstacles and a fixed rope was needed to climb a short, steep gully. The final section of the ascent involved breaking through deep snow however the summit was reached in less than five hours (Figures 26 and 27).



Figure 26: High Camp on Snaght Kang

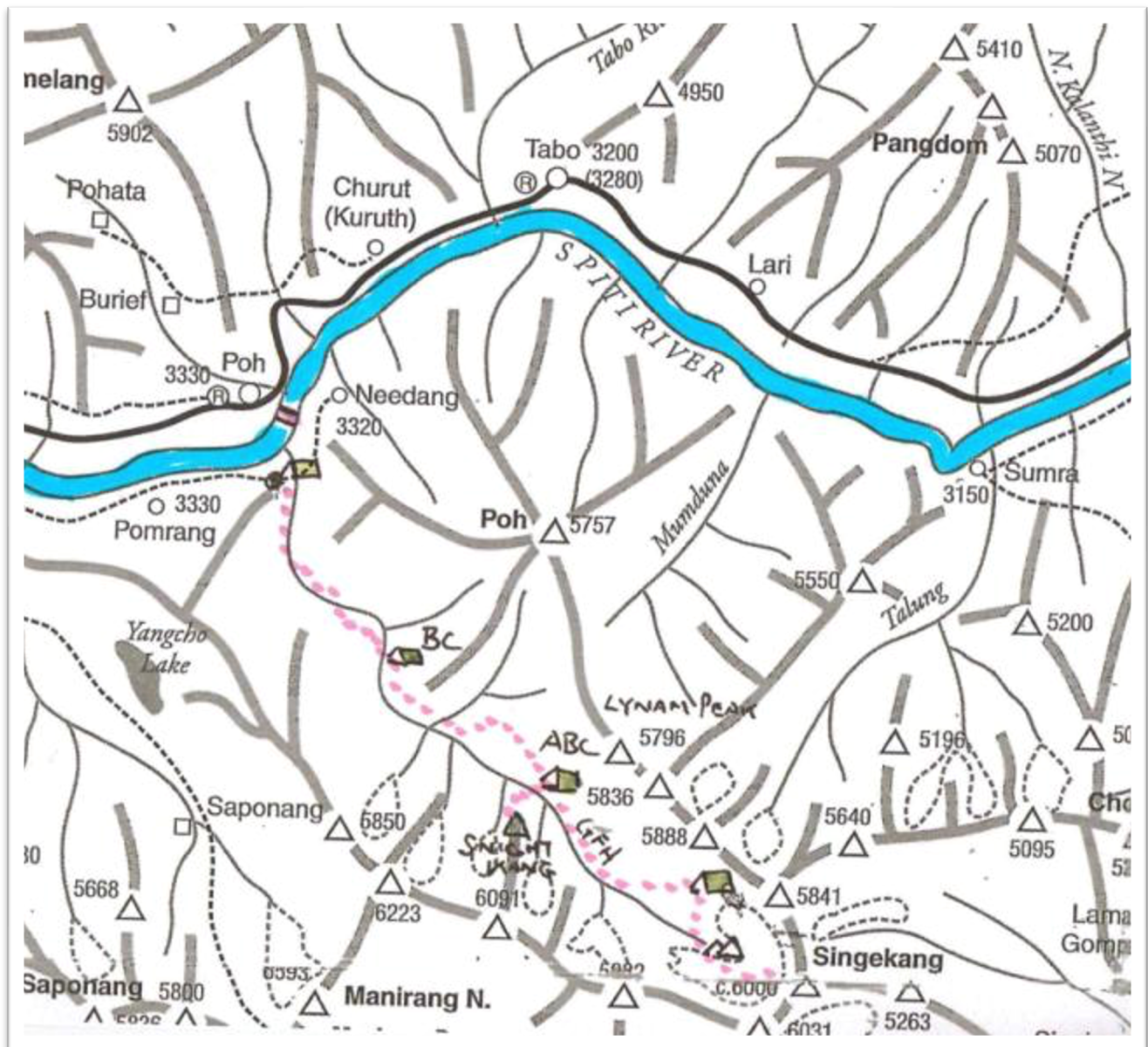


Figure 27: Approaching the summit ridge on Snaght Kang

Conclusion

Despite being unable to climb Singekang, our expedition was successful. Not only were we the first mountaineers to explore the Singekang valley, but we were also able to make the first ascent of Snaght Kang (5500m). We hope that our efforts will encourage others to explore this stunning region in the future.

Appendix



The route taken by the expedition (red dotted line). The camp sites are also illustrated.