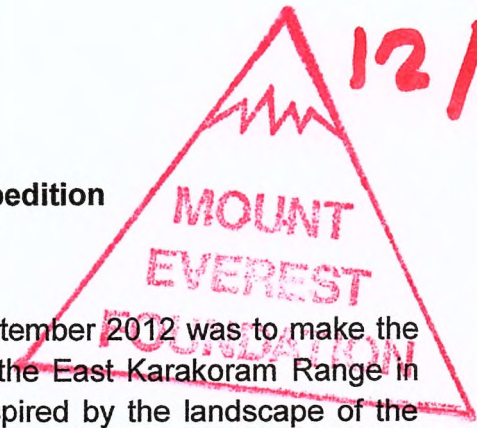


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## Indo-British 2012 Rimo III Expedition

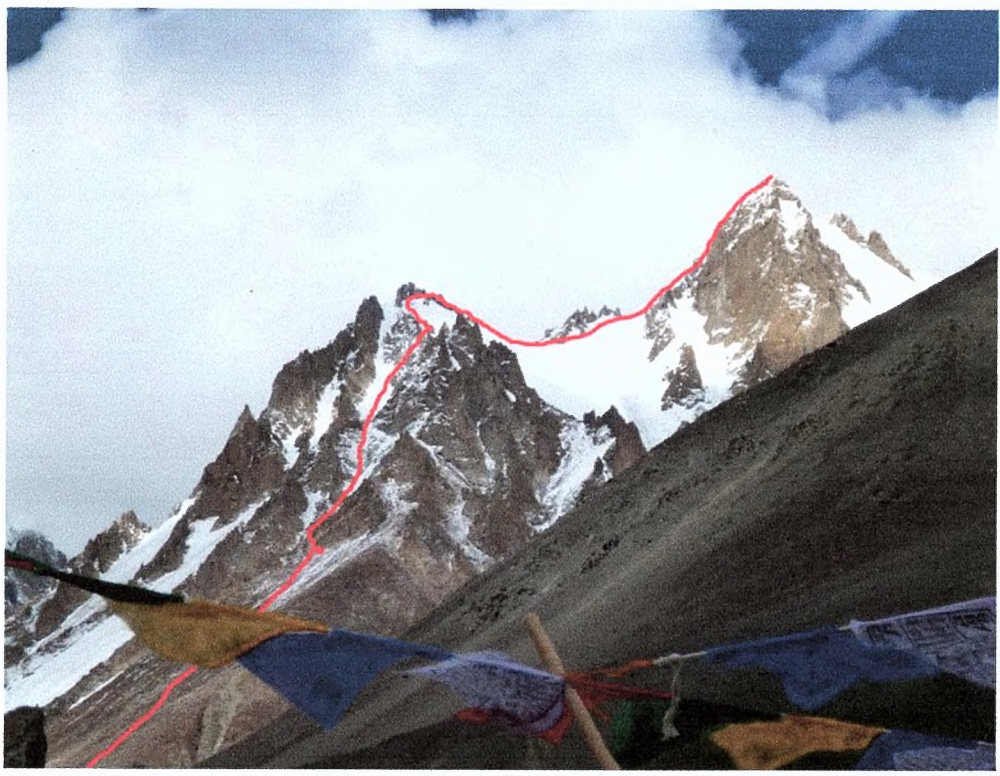
### Summary

The primary aim of this expedition in August and September 2012 was to make the first ascent of the south face of Rimo III (7233m) in the East Karakoram Range in India. The secondary aim was to make visual art inspired by the landscape of the region.

Rimo III lies near the head of the North Terong Glacier which is a tributary of the Siachen Glacier. This is militarily sensitive area. The expedition was notable in being the first foreign expedition to be granted permission to travel up the Terong Glacier since Doug Scott's in 1989.

The expedition consisted of three British and four Indian climbers, one British artist, one Indian liaison officer, two Indian army representatives, and six Indian support staff.

The expedition was plagued by unseasonably bad weather: warm, wet, and cloudy. Rimo III was not climbed. However the first ascent of an attractive 6365m peak (suggested name Dungalung Kangri) was made (1200m, AI3) and the artistic objectives were achieved. Cordial relations were enjoyed between the team and the Army and the expedition ran smoothly.



Dungalung Kangri showing route of first ascent: Photo Simon Yearsley



## **Expedition members**

Satyabrata Dam (Indian Leader)  
Malcolm Bass (UK Leader)  
Paul Figg (Climber)  
Simon Yearsley (Climber)  
Rachel Antill (Artist)  
Raj Kumar (LO. Indian Army.)  
Konchok Thinless (Indian Climber)  
Tashi Phunchok (Indian Climber)  
Dan Singh Harkotiya (Indian Climber)  
Norbu Tamang (Cook)  
Nima Bhutia (Cook)  
Pemba Lama (Assistant)  
Ramesh Lama (Assistant)  
Padma Dorjay (Assistant)  
Stanzin Norboo (Assistant)  
Kanchan Singh (Indian Army Representative)  
Vinay Kumar (Indian Army Representative)

## **Climbing history of the Rimo group**

Rimo I, the highest peak in group at 7385m, was first attempted by the 1985 Indo-British expedition. This attempt was thwarted by the infamous dropping of the Venables' rucksack. The same expedition did succeed in making the first ascent of Rimo III (7233m). Dave Wilkinson and Jim Fotheringham made a bold journey around the opposite side of the mountain from the Terong and climbed Rimo III from the north east. Rimo I was eventually climbed in 1988 by an Indo-Japanese team via the south face to south west ridge. In 1989 Doug Scott and Sonam Paljor led an Indo-British team to the Rimo Group. They climbed Rimo II (7373m, and arguably only a point on the north west ridge of Rimo I rather than a separate summit), and made the second ascent of Rimo IV. They had their eyes firmly fixed on the inspiring South Face of Rimo III, but the expedition was called off prematurely.

## **Permission, joint expedition, and other administrative issues**

To reach the Terong glacier one has to travel a short distance up the Siachen glacier and this involves passing through the major Indian Army base at the snout of the glacier. It is this fact that has understandably prevented many prospective expeditions from gaining permission to access the Terong or other Siachen tributaries.

We made our application through the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) with the support of our Indian agent in the usual way. Expeditions to all mountains in the East Karakoram are required to be joint ventures with an equal number of Indian members and an Indian leader. We were fortunate in that our friend Satyabrata Dam,



a renowned mountaineer and explorer, was keen to join us and agreed to be the Indian leader. Our other Indian members were employees of our agent, and we paid financially for their presence on the trip. They were all experienced mountain professionals equivalent to advanced high altitude porters (or “sherpas” where the term does not imply Sherpa ethnicity). This method of recruiting Indian climbers is becoming standard for foreigners who don’t have a group of their own Indian climbing friends keen to go on the trip. It is this aspect that made our trip expensive. The Indian climbing members must have credible mountaineering CVs to pass muster with the IMF, so, if they are paid members, the wage bill will be high. Our paid members were all very competent and added a great deal to our trip. Our standard porters largely vanished after the third day of the four day walk in, and several never turned up at all. So Tashi, Thinless, and Dan Singh made good by carrying multiple big loads, and by organising the remaining porters efficiently. They were essential in establishing and maintaining our ABC, and helped us with loads carrying through the icefall leading from the Terong to the upper cwm below Rimo III. They were all excellent men to have in camp, and we enjoyed their company.

The process of acquiring permission didn’t take overly long. We had our application with the IMF in February 2012 and had our permission through in good time for making our visa applications. The IMF steered our application through the Indian Government departments, most critical being the Army who have the final say. We can only guess as to why we got permission where others have failed. Potential factors in our favour were:

- The passage of time without military incident on the Siachen
- Satyabrata Dam being our leader. Satya has a high national profile and had a distinguished Navy career (now retired)
- We have a long history of climbing in India
- Our agent had good local army connections (but this has been the case for some unsuccessful applicants)

We had some problems obtaining insurance. Rimo is in Ladakh, which is a region in the state of Janna and Kashmir. The UK foreign office was advising against travel to remote parts of that state, although the fine print did exclude Ladakh from that warning. This deterred some insurers, although we did find a company who would insure us. Also satellite phones are banned in India and some insurers require them to be carried in remote areas. Again we found an insurer that didn’t require them. It is essential to have insurance as it is a condition of IMF permission, and certificates may be examined in Delhi on the way out.

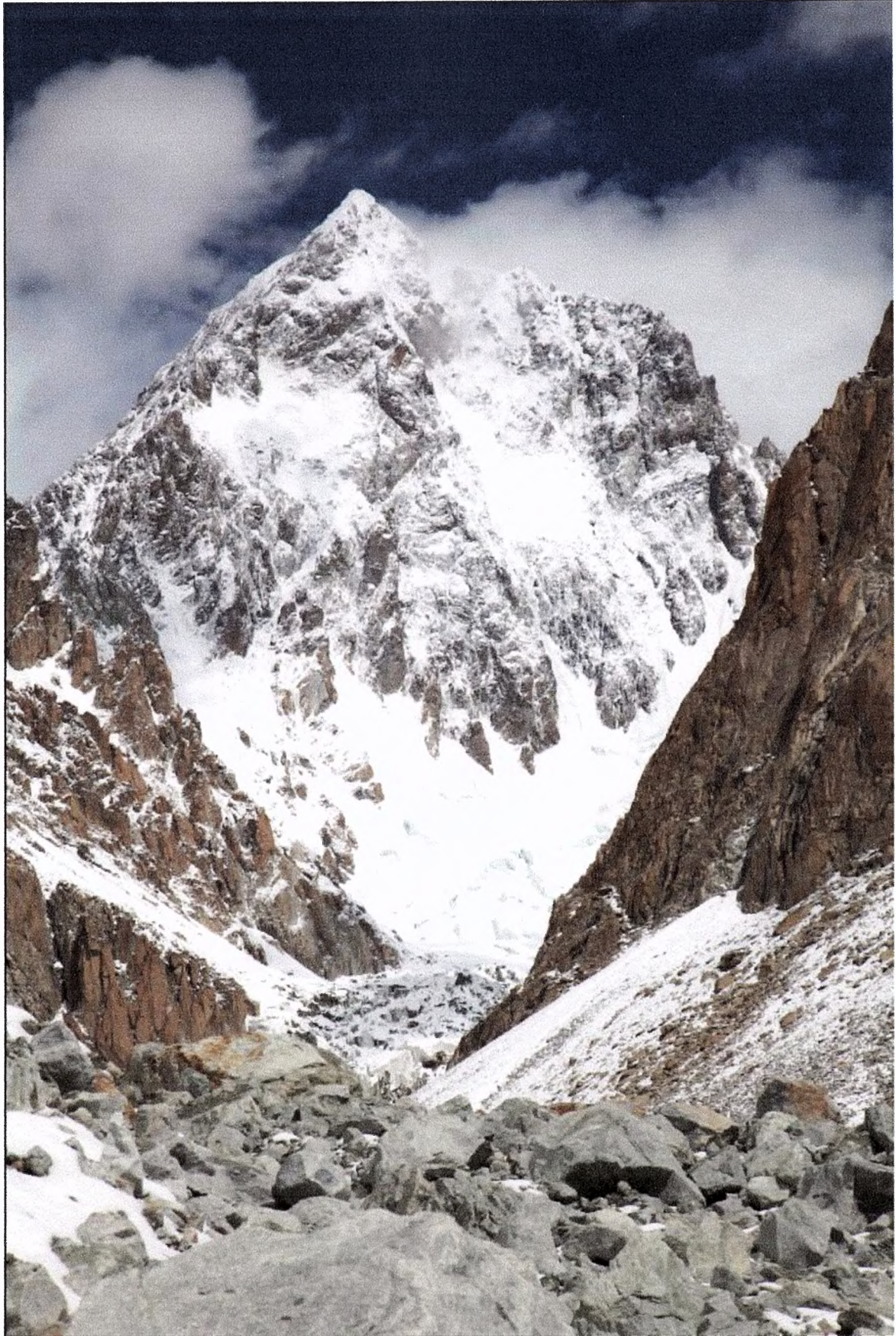
## **The plan**

The expedition plan envisaged seventeen phases:

1. UK phase. Get permission. Get the right kit and people together.
2. Fly to India with all our kit.
3. First Delhi phase: briefing by IMF
4. Fly to Leh.
5. Leh phase: Early acclimatisation plus shopping for additional food to use above ABC.
6. Road travel to foot of Siachen glacier.
7. Walk in to BC on North Terong glacier
8. Establish ABC higher up North Terong glacier.
9. Acclimatise above ABC and scope route.
10. Climb route and descend.
11. Disestablish ABC.
12. Walk out to road at foot of Siachen.
13. Road travel back to Leh.
14. Second Leh phase. Eating and drinking.
15. Fly to Delhi
16. Second Delhi phase. IMF de-brief. More eating and drinking.
17. Fly home.

This was basically what happened. There was some variance from the original plan in Phase 10.







## The trip

We arrived in Delhi on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August, having flown with all our kit as excess hold baggage. This meant that we could avoid the joys of Indian customs: on past trips we have spent at least two days liberating our freight from customs. Hold luggage is the way to go.

We met Satya and the rest of the Indian team at the IMF. Whilst Satya lives close to Delhi, the other Indian members had flown from Leh, travelling very lightly. This meant that they could carry some of our excess luggage on the flight to Leh. We were still overweight for the flight, and had to pay extra. Luggage weight is carefully controlled on the Delhi-Leh flight, and pre booked excess is much cheaper, so it is worth planning this part of the trip with some care.

The flight to Leh was short and spectacular, and it was an excited party that arrived in Leh. I started to feel ill with a viral infection almost immediately and took to my bed. The rest of the team shopped for hill food (noodles, soups, nut and namkeen) to supplement the High Five products we had brought from the UK. We stayed two full days in Leh (3524m) to begin our acclimatisation. Once the hard work had been done I rallied and was able to join the team for a day trip to a nearby monastery on the second day. Raj Kumar, our highly experienced and effective LO, worked hard during these two days doing the needful with local military and civilian authorities. We discovered that a joint IMF/Indian Army expedition to Rimo I was already in the field: hopefully they would have dealt with the Terong River crossing.

The next day the expedition set off by road in two jeeps and a lorry, the road climbing steeply into the Ladakh Range north of Leh. Half an hour later a mobile phone call from the Army ordered us to stop. We knew that the expedition would be accompanied by two Indian Army representatives, and the halt was required whilst it was clarified where we would link up with these soldiers. A couple of anxious hours followed, but it gave us a chance to take an early lunch whilst Satya and Raj worked the 'phones. Once it was established that we would meet the Army guys at Siachen Base we were on our way for a great day's driving over the Khardung La (5395m) into the Nubra Valley. The last section of the drive in the soft evening light to our guest house near Panamik was particularly memorable.

The next day we continued up the Nubra Valley towards the Siachen, soon passing the limit of civilian travel. A few miles short of the glacier snout we were met by the Indian army with a generous packed lunch and hot tea which we took in the shade of the scrub willows growing on the vast flood plain of the Nubra. After lunch we drove a short leg to a camp site that the Army had identified for us on the flood plain. It was idyllic. Little streams of clear water gurgled through clean sandy channels, willows



gave shade, and birds and butterflies flitted about. A phone discussion took place between the team and the base commander as to how long we needed to remain camped here for acclimatisation. We agreed on two nights, longer than we had planned, but very short by the Army's acclimatisation protocol which would suggest four nights. We suggest future teams factor this into their plans; negotiation might not always be possible on this point.

As soon as we found the huge granite boulders lying on flat sandy landings we knew our stay would be worthwhile. Uncompleted projects made our eventual departure bitter sweet.

Two days later, accompanied by an Army escort, we drove up to the Army Base near the snout of the Siachen glacier. Again the army were generous hosts providing us with tea and biscuits as we readied ourselves to begin the walk in. Our porters arrived, and we met Kanchan Singh and Vinay Kumar who would be the Indian Army representatives on the trip.

It was an amazing privilege to start walking up the immense Siachen glacier. In deference to our Indian hosts need to maintain good security this report will not say much about this part of the journey.

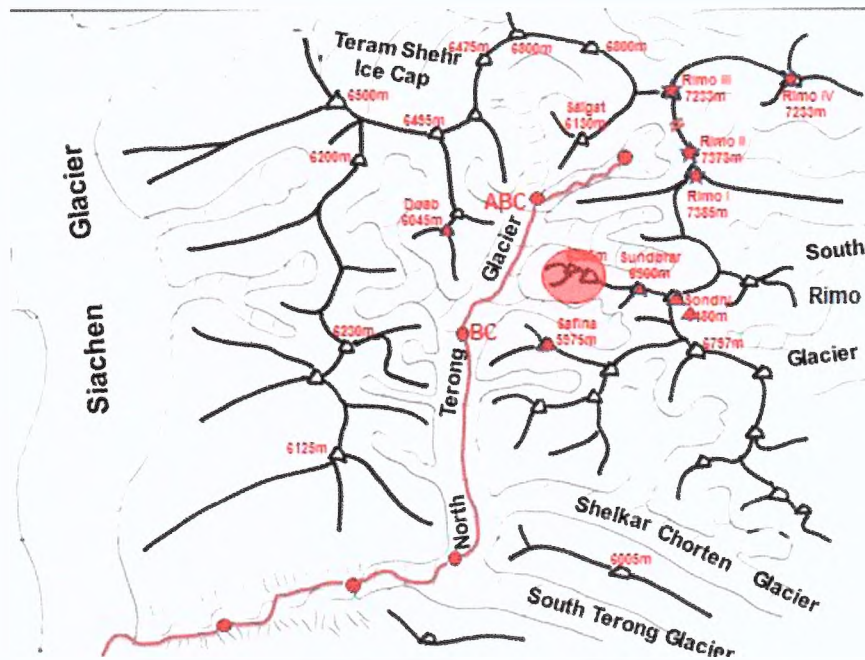
By midday we were descending the side of the Siachen to the Terong valley and the turbulent Terong River which sinks into the Siachen glacier. We found the lower Terong Valley to be particularly beautiful. Steep granite cliffs on both sides would provide many lifetimes of rock climbing. The valley floor is sandy and lightly vegetated at the edges, with wide banks of water worn cobbles on the river's edge. The river meanders across the valley and at several points runs directly under the cliffs. Because of this, in normal to high flow, progressing up valley means either crossing the river or traversing the cliffs on steep rock. On our trip the Rimo I expedition ahead of us had crossed the river (using ladders) where it was braided, and then fixed a Tyrolean traverse which was there for us to use. We therefore dropped off the Siachen glacier onto the true left bank of the Terong River, then followed this bank till further progress was barred by the river running under the cliffs, at which point we crossed using the Tyrolean. Having crossed we stayed on the true right bank till we met the Terong Glacier.

We camped in a superb spot amongst willow scrub a mile or two short of the Tyrolean. This became known as Jungle Camp. (In 1985 it was known as Dust Camp). The next day we crossed the Tyrolean (time consuming with all the loads) and walked up the other bank to camp at the foot of the Terong glacier.

Two days later on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August we arrived at base camp (4950m) on the North Terong glacier on a site we shared with the Rimo I expedition, a marginally flatter than average section of medial moraine beneath Safina, an ugly shale peak on the true left side of the Terong. Not the greatest base camp, but we could see our objective, the gorgeous south face of Rimo III. By this stage, although we had



arrived, we had virtually no porters left, and loads were scattered all along the approach march. This never delayed our progress, but Tashi, Thinless, Dan Singh and all our camp staff had to work very hard throughout the first week of the trip to get everything up to BC.



Sketch map of North Terong glacier: Simon Yearsley after Harish Kapadia



Base camp and upper North Terong glacier. Snowy peaks from right are Dungleung Kangri, Rimo I (very cloudy), Rimo III, and unnamed 6800m peak. Photo Rachel Antill.



Our base camp was still a good distance from Rimo III and so our plan had always been to run two staffed camps, base and advanced base. We would have preferred to staff the one camp, but there is a certain gravity to a base camp, and once one is established there will always be someone who wants to stay there. And they will need a cook, who will need an assistant and so on. So two staffed camps it would be. Over the next few days we established ABC at 5350m at the foot of the steep glacier (almost an icefall) leading up under the west face of Rimo I to the cwm below the south face of Rimo III. ABC consisted of six small tents and a stone built kitchen shelter with a tarpaulin roof.

It was time to start acclimatising to higher elevations, so Malcolm, Paul and Simon packed climbing kit and a few days' food and gas and set off up towards the face. The steep glacier/icefall was most unpleasant, and, despite the small cairns erected by an earlier scouting party from the Rimo I expedition, route finding wasn't easy. The whole place was in a state of gradual disintegration. Over the course of our trip a major ice bridge collapsed, forcing a change of route, and rolling rocks were a feature throughout, one catching Simon a nasty blow on the elbow later in the trip.

We spent three nights in the upper cwm at about between 5800 and 6000m, finding our way round the maze of crevasses and bergschrunds. On the third day we climbed up to 6400m on the ground beneath the Rimoll/Rimoll col, finding the steeper ground to be brittle ice with little or no snow cover. We scoped what we thought was the best line on the south face of Rimo III, declared ourselves acclimatised, and went back down to ABC.





Malcolm finding a way through the crevasses in the upper cwm: Photo Simon Yearsley

Whilst we had been away Satya and Rachel had explored various aspects of the upper North Terong and indulged in a frenzy of photography. There had been hopes of finding a reasonable way onto the Teram Shar ice cap from the head of the Terong, but all possible routes looked to be menaced by massive seracs.

After a couple of days rest Malcolm, Paul, Simon, Satya, Thinless, Tashi and Dan Singh went back to the upper cwm. On the evening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, after the afternoon rock fall had quieted, the three British climbers set off for the face. We carried five days food and gas, one single skin tent and a bivvy bag, but no sleeping bags; our plan being to rest in the heat of the day. We had chosen a route to the left of the crest of the central spur on the face. The bergschrund was more complex than anticipated, but after that we made good progress up moderate slopes of brittle ice. The air was warmer than it should have been at night at 6000+metres, and the number of fallen blocks embedded in the ice disturbed us, as did the humming of rock fall from a loose area to our left, so we climbed in pitches. Then, down valley, the stars started to go out. We climbed on. Then, as we reached the foot of the large



couloir (c6200m) that we anticipated would take us half way up the face, it began to snow. Not being in the best place for snow, and it still being early in the trip, we quickly decided to go down and return in clearer, colder conditions. Our decision was vindicated when it started to rain as we abseiled. Rocks were starting to fall down our line as we reached the bergschrund, and there was water in the v thread holes we drilled. Tashi and Satya made us soup for breakfast as we reached the tents. We left one tent pitched, filled it with food, gas and gear, and went back down to ABC.

A rather dull ten days followed. It snowed every day, and sometimes it rained. The sky was constantly grey and everything dripped. The peaks were shrouded in cloud. But we clung on to our foothold at ABC until the last possible moment, until we knew that there wasn't time for the face to clear and us to climb it before the porters arrived. Then we went back up to the cwm to retrieve our gear. The upper cwm was thigh deep in snow, and we were lucky to find our tent; only a couple of inches showed above the drifts.

We wound up ABC and everyone went back to BC. But we were still optimistic about finding something to climb. There haven't been many expeditions to the North Terong, and whilst Harish Kapadia and other members of the 1985 expedition had climbed several of the 6000ers in the basin, there are plenty more still to be climbed. We didn't have much time, so we needed an accessible objective. We also needed to avoid open snow slopes as they were all laden by now. The unclimbed peak at the west end of the Sondhi-Sundrbar ridge, marked on Harish's sketch map as 6330m, fitted the bill. It is an attractive, largely rocky peak with a noticeably lower sub peak to its west. The south west face, conveniently close to BC, consists of several broad couloirs, or narrow ice fields, separated by rocky spurs. These lead to a gendarmed ridge, which in turn leads to the sub peak, then slightly down to a col below a steeper final summit pyramid. Our spirits rose, a plan was hatched, and on the afternoon 13<sup>th</sup> of September Malcolm, Paul, and Simon were scrambling up scree, then an easy rocky ridge, to a superb bivouac site. It was fun to be moving upwards again in the rare afternoon sun. It snowed overnight, but not enough to cause concern, so just after dawn we set off at a fair pace, soloing up and across the ice fields and couloirs, and the ridges and ribs that separated them.





Paul and Simon on Dungleung Kangri: Photo Malcolm Bass

Sections of loose, snowed up rock on the ribs demanded care, and soon snow began to fall again. A final steepening took us onto the gendarmed ridge. The wind began to pick up as we moved together along this attractive feature, and snow squalls blew in on dark clouds from the south west. The summit pyramid came in and out of view as the clouds blew across. It was exhilarating to be there at over 6000m in such dramatic conditions. We reached the col where the massive snow basin of the east face swept up to the ridge. We would not be descending that way. We set off moving together up the brittle ice of the summit pyramid, but the climbing soon became too insecure for that. An increasingly deep layer of loose snow was somehow adhering to very hard, very shiny ice. To get decent purchase for tools or crampons required a hearty blow, and the muffling snow had to be mostly cleared before striking. So the climbing slowed down just as the wind sped up. Malcolm was leading and got very cold hands. Paul and Simon just got very cold. Morale faltered, questions were asked. The issue hung in the balance. Another snow squall blew in to rime our beards. It was all very Scottish. We would go on. And there was the summit, closer than we'd feared, and then we there, catching awful glimpses through the clouds down the north face. The altimeter read 6365m. It was about 4pm on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September. We didn't stay long before Simon set the first of many abseils he'd set that night and we were on our way down.





Simon, Malcolm, and Paul on the summit of Dungleung Kangri: Photo Simon Yearsley.

Had we just been going straight down the south west face to the glacier by the straightest line we would have got down very quickly. But we'd left our bivouac kit on the hidden side of one of several rocky spurs, exactly which we weren't sure. And by now it was dark. We didn't find the right spur till it got light again. When we got back to the glacier we were overjoyed to be greeted by Rachel and Satya bearing hot juice and pakora.

We had one day of decent weather at base camp before the clouds came again. The first day of the walk out through black moraine slag heaps in constant rain was particularly grim. And so our last camp, the one we made next day at jungle camp, was particularly joyful by contrast. We were all safely across the river. The sun shone through the late afternoon and the warmed ground gave off earthy, herby, living smells. Rachel painted with Paul by her side. Malcolm and Simon scrambled on the massive granite slabs of the sidewalls. People gathered drift wood from the river side, and in the evening we built a fire around which the whole team gathered. Nothing special was said; some socks were dried and some were burnt. But we all knew that it was special.



## Accounts

INCOME		EXPENDITURE	
BMC	£1,500.00	Flights UK - India	£2,000.00
Mt Everest Foundation	£2,700.00	Flights Delhi - Leh	£780.00
Polartec	£3,088.00	Rimo expeditions	£13,800.00
Alpine Club	£800.00	Peak fee Rimo III	£1,500.00
Personal contributions	£12,212.00	Peak fee Dungleung Khangri	£220.00
		insurance	£2,000.00
	<hr/>		<hr/>
	£20,300.00		£20,300.00
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## Notes on accounts

**Rimo Expeditions** were our Indian agent. These costs cover road travel, accommodation, Indian member wages, porters, food, fuel, tent and BC kitchen equipment hire.

**Polartec** refers to the Polartec Challenge grant which we were proud to receive for the expedition.

The **BMC** (British Mountaineering Council), **The Mount Everest Foundation**, and **The Alpine Club** all generously gave us grants towards the cost of the expedition. The **Alpine Club** Grant, known as the **Alpine Climbing Fund**, is supported by **First Ascent** and is only available to members of the Alpine Club.

**The Arts Council of England** generously provided Rachel Anthill, the artist on the expedition, with a grant for the production of work after the trip. As such it is not included in these accounts.

**Personal contributions** refer to the contributions of the 4 British members.



## **Support for the expedition**

Expeditions to the greater ranges are inevitably expensive and would be untenable for climbers without huge private means if it weren't for the excellent grants available to support British alpinists attempting new routes and first ascents. The grants strategically prioritise new routes and first ascents, and this focus enables the UK, a country with no glaciated mountains, to maintain a proud reputation as a major alpine climbing nation. This plays its part in creating a strong national culture of outdoor pursuits which benefits health and wellbeing, and supports a vigorous outdoor pursuits economy. The British Mountaineering Council, Mount Everest Foundation, and Alpine Club grants were of this type. We are extremely grateful to all three bodies.

Polartec awarded us the prestigious Polartec Challenge Award which is a grant of cash and Polartec clothing, including some using the excellent new neoshell fabric.

Montane, working closely with Polartec, generously supported us by providing superb clothing and backpacks. The kit is so good that since the trip we have established a long term relationship.

High5 Sports Nutrition kindly provided us with bars, gels, sports drinks and recovery drinks. These are perfect for fuelling endurance efforts in the mountains, and are very convenient for quick recovery in bivouacs.

Lyon Equipment very helpfully granted us the Lyon Equipment Award which helped equip us with excellent eyewear, footwear, and hard ware.

Needlesports and Swaledoor Outdoors both gave us generous discounts on all sorts of kit, and were friendly and helpful as we painstakingly decided what we wanted!

Report compiled by Malcolm Bass, The Alpine Club.