

UK/US Himachal Pradesh Expedition report

14th May – 12th June 2015

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Acknowledgements

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Mr CS Pandey and his staff at Himalayan Run & Trek Pvt Ltd

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Summary

A group of six climbers (4 UK, 2 US) was assembled to climb in a previously unexplored side valley of a larger valley which branches from the Darcha-Mayar valley in Himachal Pradesh. Three members of the team had previously visited the area, climbing a Peak 6080m (now Goat Peak). During this visit, they noted the existence of several appealing objectives in the valley, in particular a couloir leading close to the summit of a subpeak of Ramjak.

During the spring of 2015, this area experienced unusually large snowfall, which meant that many roads remained closed at the time the expedition took place. The Rohtang Pass, fundamental to accessing the area, opened only one day prior to the expedition's arrival in Manali. This extra snowfall, in conjunction with rockfall and porter shortages (due to the Nepal earthquake in April 2015), meant that the approach to basecamp took 6 days, rather than the planned 2-3.

Unstable weather continued throughout the expedition. In spite of this, one of the objective peaks was climbed, in addition to another smaller peak on the Ramjak massif.

Team



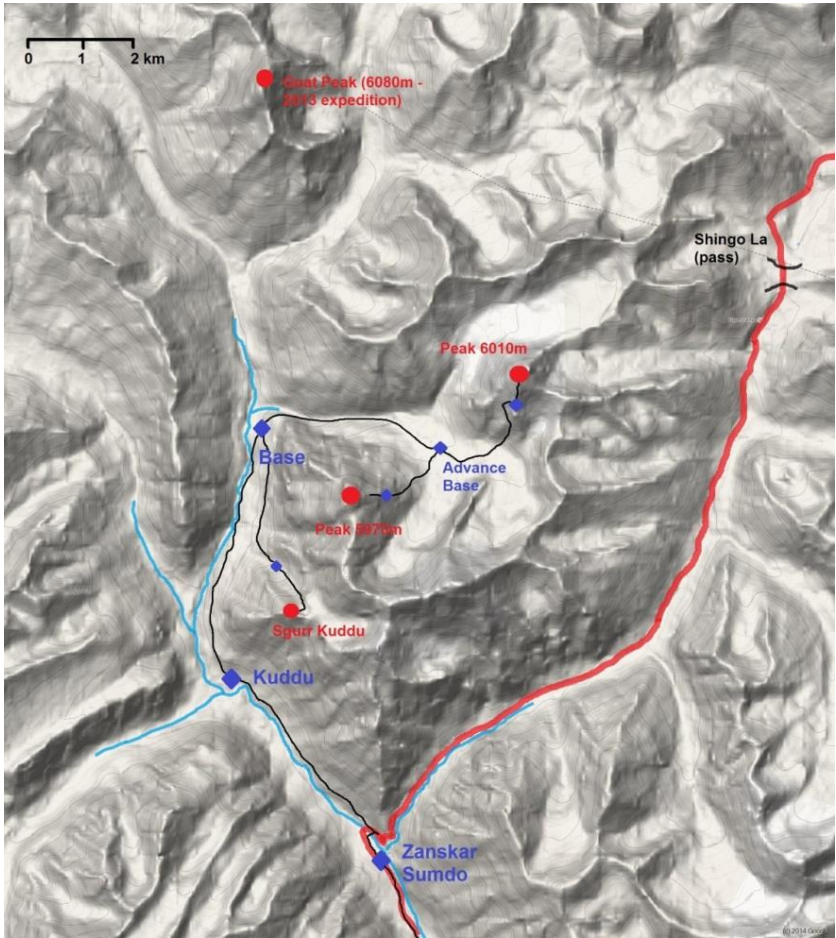
The climbing team, from left to right: Mangal Singh (HAPorter), Lakpa Sherpa (HAPorter), Andy Nisbet (UK - Team Leader), Bill McConachie (US), Paul Swienton (US - front), Steve Kennedy (UK - back), Robert Adams (UK), Suman Kant (Liaison Officer), Tom Adams (UK). Photo: Lopsang Sherpa (HAPorter). They were supported by Base Camp Manager and Cook, Naveen Chandra, and his assistant Sandeep Singh.

The team divided into three natural pairs of climbers, nicknamed “the children”, “the dads”, and “the grandads” (based upon a combination of age and beard length/colour).

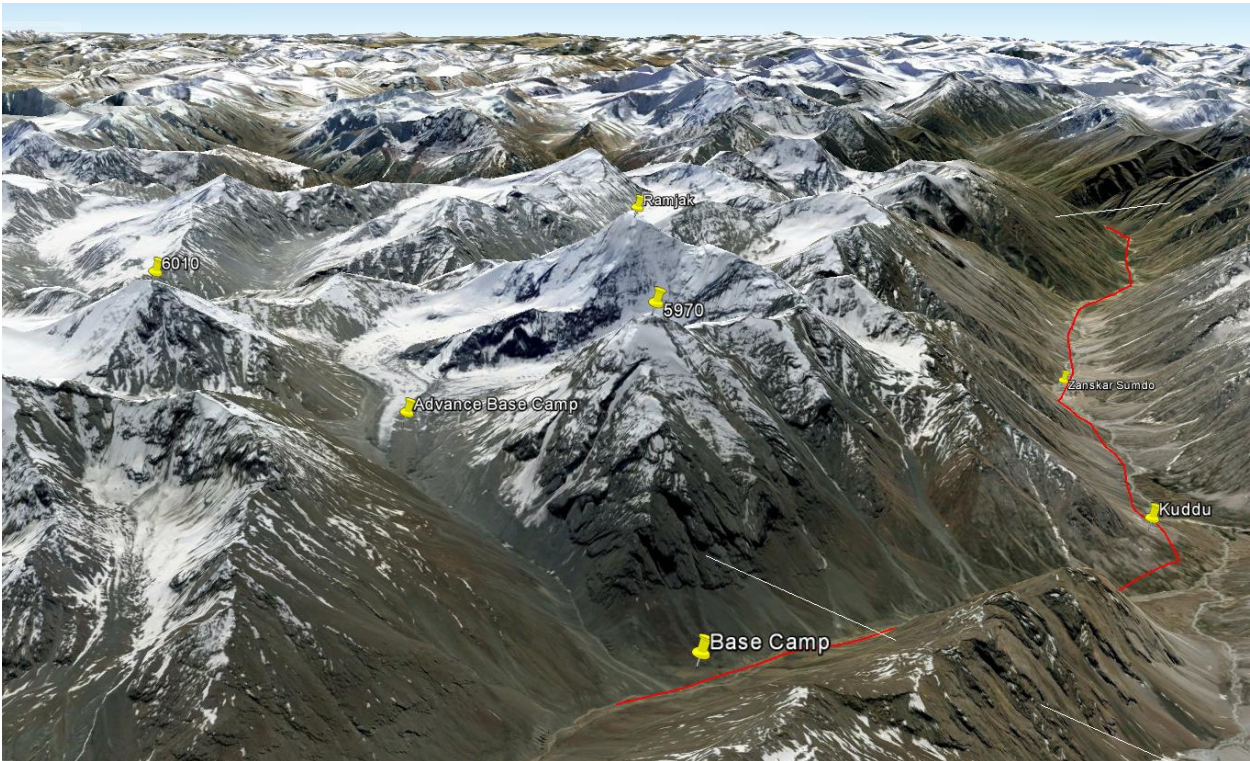
Objective

The expedition set out to explore a side valley of a larger valley which branches from the Darcha-Mayar valley in Himachal Pradesh, with the aim of climbing a mountain of height 6010m (77°8'20"E; 32°53'2"N) as marked on the Olizane trekking map, Ladakh and Zaskar South. The larger valley is the next valley upstream (north-west) and parallel to the main trekking route over the Shingo La and was visited by a UK team (current members AN, SK, RA in addition to Bob Hamilton and Susan Jensen) in 2013 when they climbed a peak of height 6080m (naming it Goat Peak).

During the same trip the team also identified an couloir leading to the shoulder a satellite peak of Ramjak (spot height 5970m, 77°6'33"E 32°51'57"N), which was considered to be a particularly appealing alternative/additional objective.



Map showing location of expedition camp locations (blue diamonds) and key summits (red circles). Red line – road, blue lines – rivers. Black lines – walking/climbing routes. See appendix for additional map.



Overview of area from NW, taken from Google Earth.



Peak 6010m at the head of the side valley, SW aspect. Photo: Andy Nisbet.



Peak 5970m NE aspect showing couloir. Photo: Rob Adams.

Approach Drive

The Rohtang La was unusually snowy and we were the first foreigners to be allowed to drive over it on 18 May 2015, and only because we were a specified climbing expedition. The road was closed again the next day due to strike action! We could only drive as far as Dartse, after which the road was blocked by rockfall, and soon after by snow. So the approach trek started here, two days trek lower than we had planned.

Trek to Base Camp

Due to the earthquake in Nepal, many Nepalese porters had returned home so we had 19 (plus mules on the road) instead of 50. This meant double loads and double days for many. But base camp at 4300m was reached successfully despite concerns that the route would be too snowy. This took 6 days rather than the planned 3. In the upper valley above Kuddu, we were able to trek along the river bed, which was covered by avalanche debris, rather than the higher and more difficult route over gullies as in 2013.



The view north from basecamp: Goat Peak (6080m), much snowier than in 2013. Photo: Andy Nisbet.



Deteriorating weather at base camp. Photo: Rob Adams.



View S from base camp. Photo: Tom Adams.

Exploring the Side Valley and ABC

After 5 days of bad weather, ABC was established on 28 May at 4930m on a safe and relatively flat site on a rocky ridge which had formed between two branches of the glacier. The large amount of snow meant that the going up the side valley was easy, being on snow rather than moraine.



The side valley approaching ABC, showing the N face of Peak 5970m. Photo: Rob Adams.

Peak 6010m

Shortly after establishing our ABC on 28 May, expedition members took a reconnaissance hike up the rocky ridge above ABC to better view the approaches and potential routes on both 6010 and 5970. On 29 May, Andy Nisbet and Bill McConachie made a casual carry of supplies up the rocky ridge, traversing across the easy glacier (with its crevasses well covered by snow), to reach the long lateral moraine at the foot of the mountain. Snowy weather precluded moving up from ABC on the 30th.

On 31 May, AN, BM and HAP Mangal Singh followed the same route up the rocky ridge and across the glacier. Then they climbed snow and a subsequent couloir on the SW face to camp under a small rock outcrop on the S ridge at about 5730m, circa 10am. The weather soon deteriorated and a windy and snowy afternoon and night followed with all three in a small two-man bivvy tent. At 8:30am on 1 June with improved weather, MS and AN (not feeling recovered from his cold and chest congestion) started down to ABC. BM climbed fresh, but safe and sometimes moderately steep snow

(perhaps exceeding 60 or 70 degrees) past several rock bands. He topped out on the summit of the peak before noon with fantastic views of Peak 5970m and Ramjak. The route was roughly PD+ or AD- in difficulty.

While we thought the peak had not previously been climbed, BM found bamboo wands on the summit and it appears to have been climbed unofficially (as far as we can tell) from the Shingo La side. He descended uneventfully to ABC by late afternoon where he and AN then waited for several days for better weather and snow conditions to be able to try the east ridge on 5970 previously attempted by the rest of the team. They made an exploratory foray up 5970 on 3 June, but weather did not improve. AN returned to BC on the 3rd and BM on the 4th.



Bill McConachie (selfie) on the summit of peak 6010m.

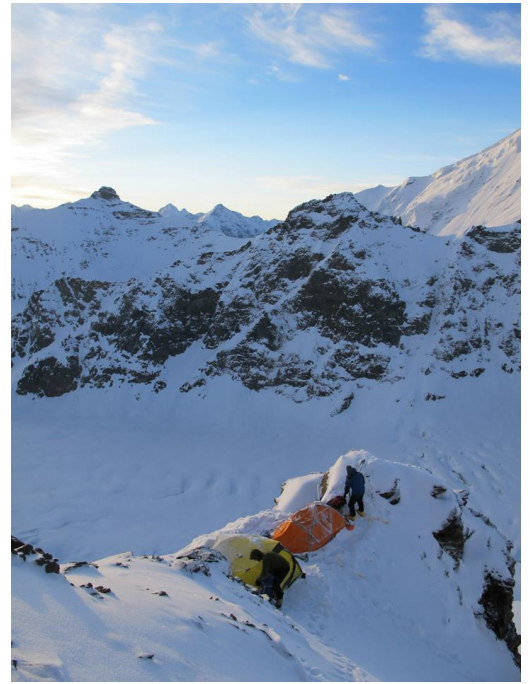


Peak 6010m, taken from high camp on Peak 5970m, showing route and location of high camp. Photo: Tom Adams

Peak 5970m

Several members of the team had been very excited about the prospect of climbing a large couloir on a satellite peak of Ramjak. Early during the trip an initial reconnaissance walk was made to investigate this possibility, during which it was clear that the face through which the couloir passed was highly avalanche prone due to the repeated snow fall. The couloir itself appeared to contain unconsolidated powder snow and was capped by a large ice sheet and cornices. For this reason this objective was discounted at this stage.

From ABC team members Steve Kennedy, Paul Swinton, Rob and Tom Adams also attempted to climb the east ridge of the mountain. A camp was established on a rock outcrop at around 5550m. After spending one night here, the team climbed higher, before encountering dangerous snow at around 250m below the summit and deciding to retreat. After returning to base camp for two nights, a second attempt was considered, but continued poor weather meant that the team climbed no higher than Advance Base Camp.



Peak 5970m. Left: East ridge – the team’s high point was on snowfield approximately halfway along the left hand skyline (circa 5750m). Right: Ridge camp at 5550m. Photos: Rob Adams.



Peak 5970 NE aspect, viewed from high on Peak 6010m, showing the attempted E ridge. Photo: Bill McConachie.

Sgurr Kuddu (new summit: 5300m)

During the afternoon of 6th June 2015, Steve Kennedy and Paul Swinton, with the assistance of Lakpa Sherpa, set out to attempt the unclimbed peak located on the east side of the valley used as the approach to base camp just beyond and north of Kuddu. The peak was identified on the available map as having a height of approximately 5300m. After leaving base camp around mid-afternoon, and climbing to an altitude of approximately 4700 meters, an advanced camp was established on snow in the lower reaches of an enclosed cirque on the north-west side of the peak. Lakpa Sherpa then returned to base camp. In the process of gathering water from a small waterfall adjacent to the camp a significant slow moving avalanche was seen heading down the cirque towards the camp which had been set into the side of a small moraine slope. Fortunately, at the last moment the avalanche changed direction and narrowly missed the camp.

Early on 7th June 2015, the team set out from their advanced camp early at around 2:30 am in excellent weather, encountering good neve, via the cirque on the north west side to reach a prominent col close to the base of the summit snow cone at an altitude of about 5,170 meters. Thereafter, more technical mixed climbing led to the summit, with the final 130 meters consisting of steep 60 to 75 degree snow slopes and a final exposed rocky corner and snow arete. The summit comprised two rock pinnacles with the westmost being slightly higher. The ascent from the advanced camp to the summit took approximately 4.5 hours, with an additional 45 minutes spent on the summit pinnacle enjoying fine views of the Darcha Valley and beyond.

The team retraced their steps from the summit back to their advanced camp and on the same day walked out to Kuddu. The team named the peak Sgurr Kuddu. "Sgurr" means sharp-pointed peak in Gaelic, with Kuddu being the name of the area overlooked by the peak. The route has been given an alpine grade of AD.



Sgurr Kuddu from Base Camp Photo: Paul Swinton.



Right: The summit of Sgurr Kuddu. Photo: Steve Kennedy.

Bouldering (Kuddu camp)

Tom and Rob Adams returned to Kuddu camp area early and enjoyed 2 days of bouldering, climbing 33 routes on great quality granite blocks between 3 and 10m high. Many boulders had perfect clean split cracks in them, appearing as if to have been dropped from a height.

Routes allowed a diverse range of styles, from slabs to overhangs, layback cracks and chimneys. Grades assigned were treated with a degree of suspicion (particularly for slabby problems), as our rock shoes had been accidentally transported out of the valley!



Layback crack (approximately Font 5b) on the "Z-chimney boulder", near to Kuddu camp. Photo: Rob Adams.



Walking out to Kuddu during the most stable weather of the expedition! Photo: Rob Adams.

Supplementary information

Coordinates and heights

These are taken from Google Earth.

Base Camp – 77deg 05min 12sec E; 32deg 52min 40sec N; alt 4300m

Summit of peak 6010m - 77deg 08min 20sec E; 32deg 53min 24sec N; alt 6010m

There was no reason to doubt the summit height.

Support Agency in India:

Himalayan Run & Trek Pvt. Ltd (Director: Mr C.S.Pandey), T-5 Manish Chambers,

Plot No.6, L.S.C.Block-B, Mayur Vihar Phase 2, Delhi 110091, India

Tel: +91 11 22772700 Fax: +91 11 22772800 E-mail: hrtindia91@gmail.com

Expedition Dates

14 May to 12 June 2015

Climbing Period

24 May to 5 June

Expedition Schedule

| | |
|---------|--|
| 15 May | Arrive in Delhi. IMF meeting. Afternoon at Golden Palm Hotel. Train to Chandigarh. |
| 16 May | Bus to Manali, with HAPs and base camp staff. Accommodation at Dragon Hotel. |
| 17 May | Acclimatisation walk. |
| 18 May | Bus over Rohtang La to Darcha (3300m). |
| 19 May | Trek to Palamao (3700m). |
| 20 May | Trek to Zamskar Sumdo (3900m). |
| 21 May | Trek to Kuddu (4100m); return to Zamskar Sumdo. |
| 22 May | Trek to Kuddu. |
| 23 May | First porter loads to BC (4300m); 4 members stayed. |
| 24 May | All to Base Camp (4300m). |
| 25 May | Acclimatisation walk. |
| 26 May | Heavy snow overnight. |
| 27 May | Snow settling. |
| 28 May | Up to ABC (4900m). |
| 29 May | Carry to base of 6010m. |
| 30 May | Bad weather. |
| 31 May | Climb to Summit Camp (5730m). |
| 1 June | BM to summit, other members (except AN) return to BC. |
| 2 June | AN/BM stay at ABC. Bad weather. |
| 3 June | Bad weather; AN returns to BC; BM remains at ABC; 4 members return to ABC. |
| 4 June | Continued bad weather; BM returns to BC |
| 5 June | Bad weather; all at BC |
| 6 June | SK/PS go towards peak 5300m; RA/TA bouldering at Kuddu. |
| 7 June | SK/PS climb peak 5300m; RA/TA bouldering at Kuddu; porters at BC. |
| 8 June | All trek to Zanskar Sumdo |
| 9 June | Bus to Manali |
| 10 June | Bus to Delhi |
| 11 June | IMF meeting, sightseeing, shopping. |
| 12 June | Flight from Delhi. |

Accounts

All costs stated per expedition member.

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------|
| Flights (more from USA) average | £500 |
| Himalyan Run & Trek Pvt. Ltd. | £2392 |
| Additional costs to HRT | £450 |
| Insurance (global rescue) | £230 (\$329) |
| IMF peak fee and LO equipment | £126 |
| Visa | £80 |
| Tips | £105 |
| Extras (inc. meals en-route) | £200 |
| Total | £4083 |

Grants

MEF £2000

MCoFS £300

Total £283 (per member)

Final cost of expedition per person £3800

Garbage/Fuel

All garbage was returned to BC where paper was burned and the ashes covered. All bottles, cans and other garbage was packaged and taken down to the roadhead by porters, then returned to Delhi. Only kerosene was used below Base Camp and only gas above BC.

Special Experiences

It was inspiring to be in an unexplored valley and to see no-one except our own team for three weeks.

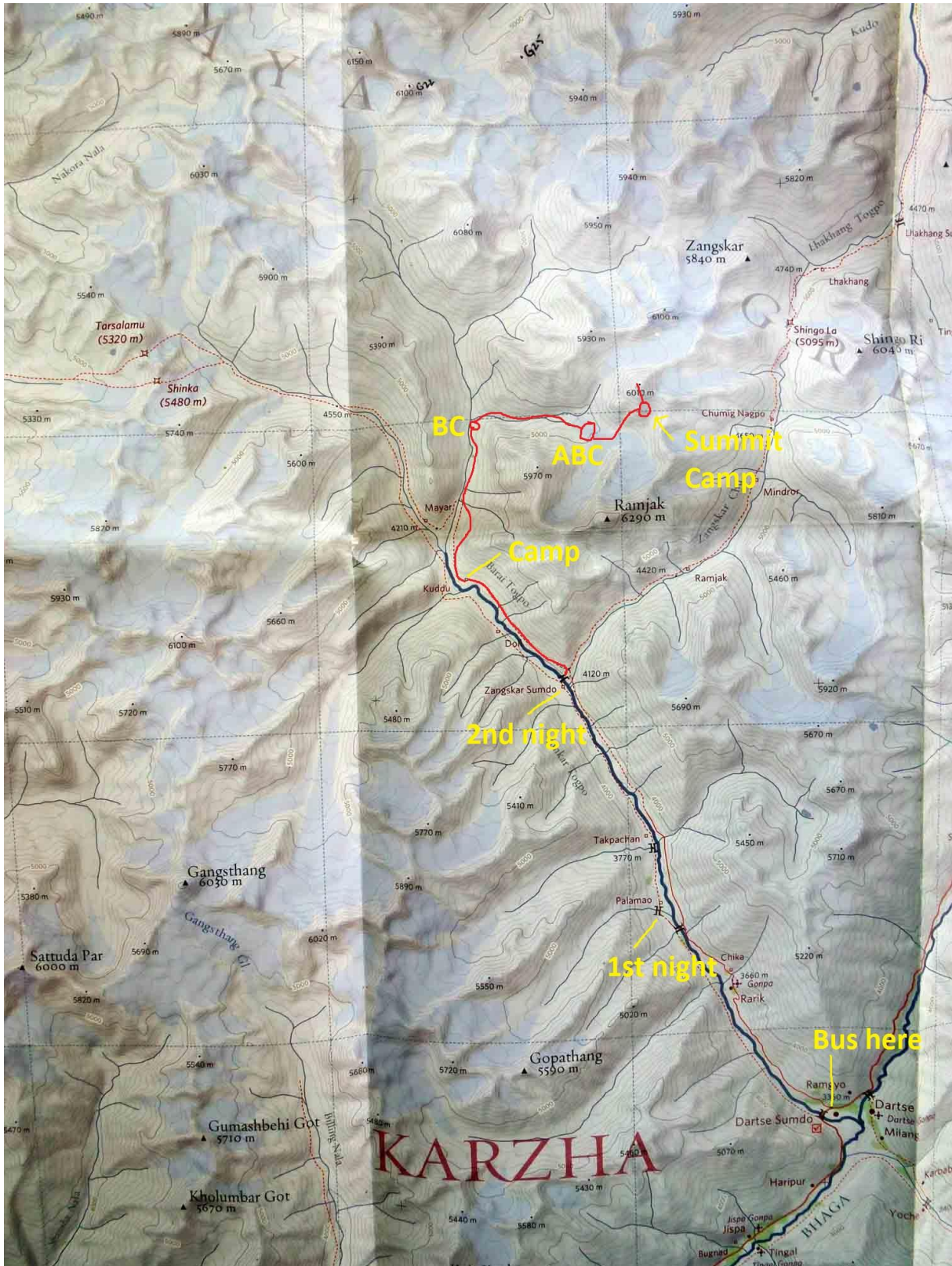
Accidents/Illness

There were no accidents or injuries. There was no illness at BC or above, so full credit to Naveen Chandra for good hygiene.

Local Villagers/Shepherds

Our valley was uninhabited, although there was a shepherds' shelter at Base Camp. So we saw no-one other than our staff and porters.

Expedition Map



Map of approach from Dartse and ascent of 6010m.

Other Potential Peaks and Climbs from the Valley

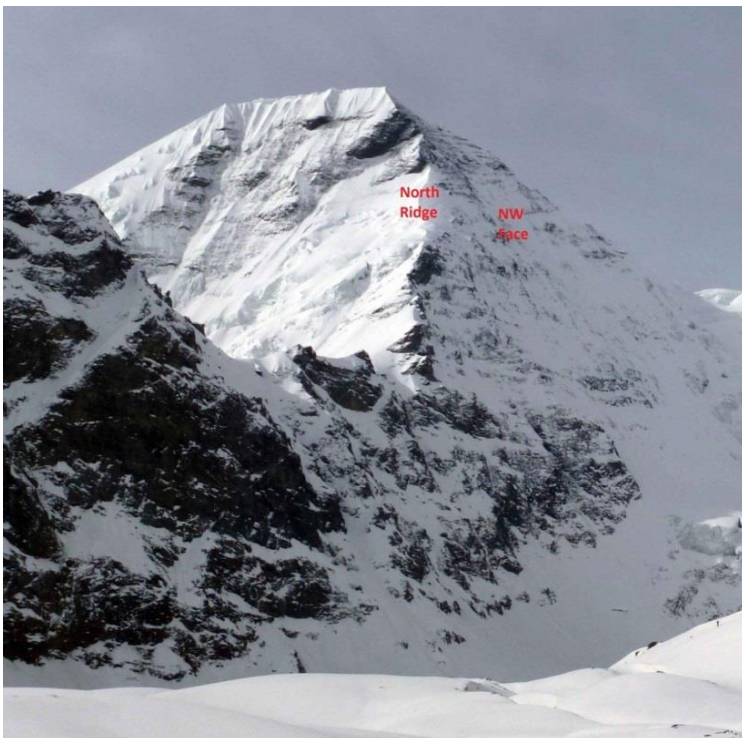
Peak 5970m

Close to the east side of our base camp, this was was attractive. It is connected to Ramjak but long and difficult, so would feel like a separate peak. It offered a fine couloir but with a steep finish, which led onto the NW ridge of this peak. The East Ridge of peak 5970m was also attractive, and was attempted by the team during the expedition. It should present no significant difficulties in good snow conditions.



Left: Peak 5970m showing couloir, with Ramjak behind. Right: East Ridge of peak 5970m. Photo: Andy Nisbet.

Ramjak – northern flanks



Ramjak looked very impressive from this side, with its North Ridge and NW Face leading directly to its very angular summit. Both looked hard!

The continuation of the North ridge also appeared to provide two very attractive large diagonal lines, and a possible traverse along the crest. Unfortunately these remained covered in unconsolidated powder snow and avalanched repeatedly for the duration of the expedition.

North side of Ramjak. Photo: Andy Nisbet.



Ramjak N aspect, showing extended N ridge, viewed from high on Peak 6010m. Photo: Bill McConachie.