



# KATKAR NALA EXPEDITION INDIA 2015

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*CHISHOLM, NICOLL & PARTNERS*  
EXPEDITION REPORT



## OVERVIEW

The aim of our expedition was to complete first ascents of peaks at around 5,900m in the Greater Himalaya, in the Zaskar / Ladakh region of northern India.

Our intentions were:

- to travel into the mountains south of Padum (by any means available – by motor car / on horseback / on foot);
- to make first ascents of mountains at around 5,900m;
- to gather information about the area to allow others to identify potential objectives for future expeditions;
- to extend the mountaineering experience of all members;
- to inspire others to attempt similar expeditions;
- to plan and execute all of our own logistics and expedition support.

We sought to plan and execute everything independently; to pursue Alpine style / mixed snow and rock routes; and to summit some of the remaining enticing Zaskar peaks. In August 2015, we arrived to find that all the bridges and the main road connecting the Tsarap river villages had been washed away completely by floods two months earlier. After a longer walk in than expected, we established a high base camp, explored, and made a first ascent of *Sgurr a Mhadaidh Fuar* ('L5') at 5,897m.

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# 1. PLANNING

## 1.1 TEAM

Our expedition team brought together individuals with a range of experiences and skills suited to an expedition of old-fashioned exploration, cultural immersion and unsupported mountaineering challenge.

### **Calum Nicoll – Expedition Leader – 24**

Calum has spent four seasons in the Alps, and in 2013 climbed in Tajikistan on an expedition involving a 15,000-mile overland drive. Calum has a great deal of exposure to climbing and exploring in Scottish winter, and in 2011 led an expedition through the High Atlas mountains. He planned and completed the first unsupported south-north crossing of Iceland (650km) on foot, with other members of the team.

### **Struan Chisholm – 22**

Struan's experience includes first ascents of *Mullach Siseal Scott* (4,495m) and *Mount Christopher Ward* (4,922m) in Tajikistan, in 2013. He crossed Iceland on foot in 2012. Struan has roamed extensively in the mountains of Scotland, and in the French Alps and North Africa.

### **Sam Newmark – 22**

Sam has travelled to countries including Iceland, Morocco and China, and last year led an expedition to the Polish Tatra. He also played a very important role in co-ordinating the 'Silk Road' Tajikistan expedition in 2013 – providing logistics and communications from the UK. Sam crossed Iceland in 2012, has completed the Cape Wrath Trail, and has Alpine and Scottish winter experience.

### **Calum McLellan – 22**

Calum is a strong winter expeditioneer and has completed several challenging routes, from climbs in the Ben Alder massif and Iceland, to mountaineering in Morocco and Vietnam.

In addition, all members of the team were competent in general expedition skills including winter mountaineering at altitude and long-distance hiking, and had been trained in outdoor First Aid.

*Pictured overleaf: Team - Struan, Calum Nicoll, Sam, Calum McLellan (and the dog) in front of the north face of Sgurr a Mhadaidh Fuar ('Hill of the Cold Hound' in Scottish Gaelic) / L5.*





## 1.2 IDENTIFICATION

Fortunately for us, the reports of the few previous expeditions to the region offered a good snapshot of this vast unclimbed playground.

Prior to the expedition, we read about the area due to a number of precedents exploring the various Zaskar valleys. There were consistent reports of significant unclimbed mountains and routes in the region. In 2009 and 2011, Kimikazu Sakamoto and his Japanese partners (Kyoto Zaskar Expedition) travelled to the region to explore, and they identified numerous unclimbed peaks among the valleys and high glaciers. The team made sketches and mapped IDs of various mountains, naming them numerically and photographing 21 peaks they believed to be unclimbed. This reconnaissance by the Japanese team was invaluable in allowing us to identify our objectives.

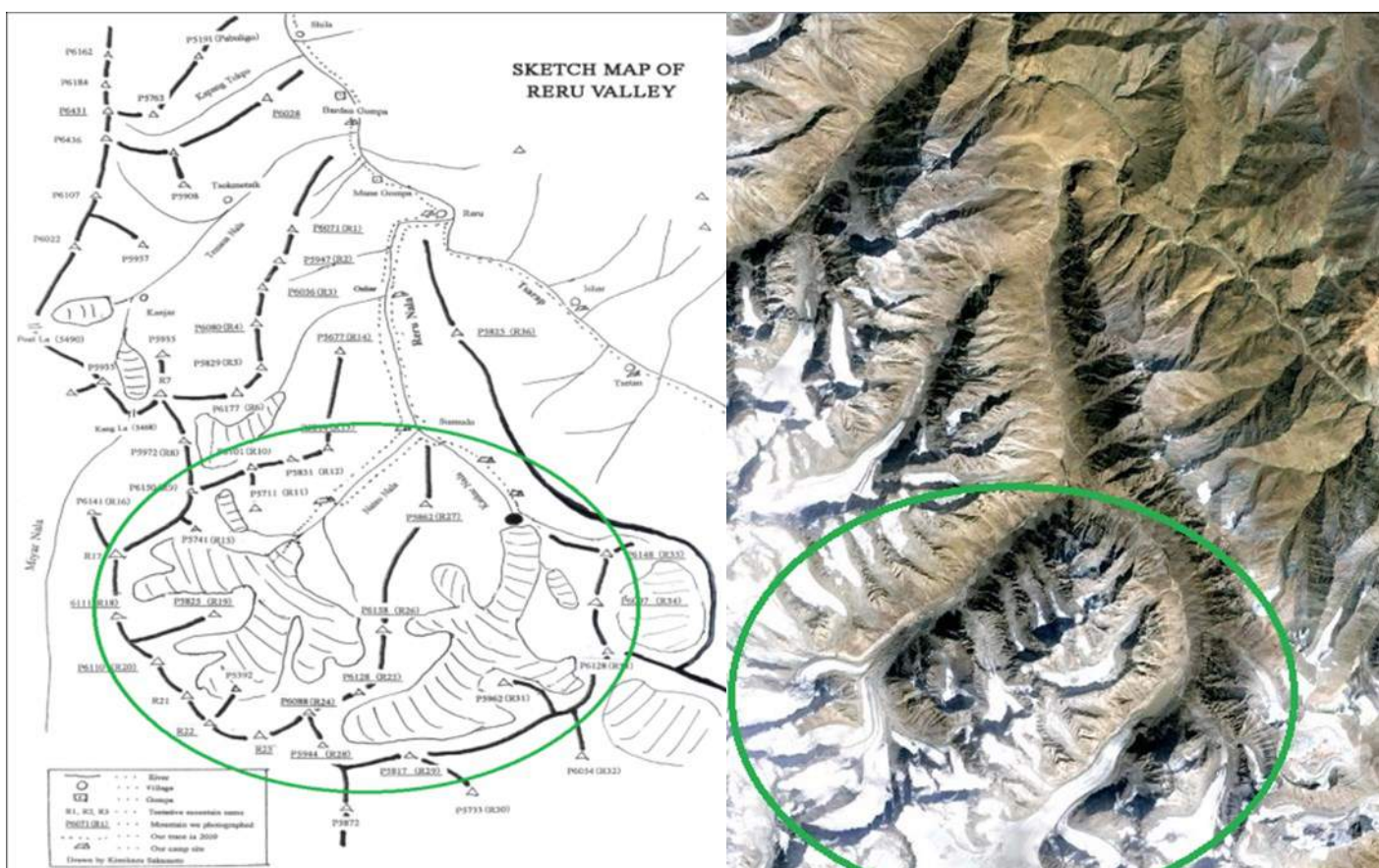
In 2011, a team from Imperial College London made an expedition to the Reru valley, south of Padum, reaching four new summits. This expedition used information from two previous expeditions (both in 2009) to the Reru valley, including the Peak Aspect expedition led by Jason Bailey, which made a first ascent of *Skilma Kangri* (5,977m) and *Mt. Jules* (5,800m). In 2012, the Scottish Zaskar Expedition made ascents just to the south-west of Padum, and another Kyoto expedition made an ascent further south, in the Lenak Nala valley.

We'll endeavour to inform further about the area in the course of this report, with the caveat for those planning future expeditions that the landscape is continually changing. This is an important point in relation to access, and it set us back fairly significantly – on a single day on our walk in towards the valley, we encountered enormous landslides, roads which simply gave way to river due to flooding, as well as a dynamite blasting team working their loud magic on a remote track!



### 1.3 OBJECTIVES

As hinted by the expedition name, we initially pinpointed the Katkar Nala / Nateo Nala valleys as targets to set a base camp and climb nearby. We proposed to reach the kink in the Tsarap River close to the village of Reru (3,400m), north-west of Dorzong. This was the point where both the Imperial (2011) and Scottish (2012) expeditions had proceeded south then south-west along a narrow glaciated valley (marked Temasa Nala below), and we intended to proceed due south for c.10km into the valley explored in 2009 by the Japanese expedition. In sketches and maps this area appeared as an enormous cluster of unclimbed mountains accessible by two large glaciers. Viewed from above with Google maps, this looks like a fortress of mountains.

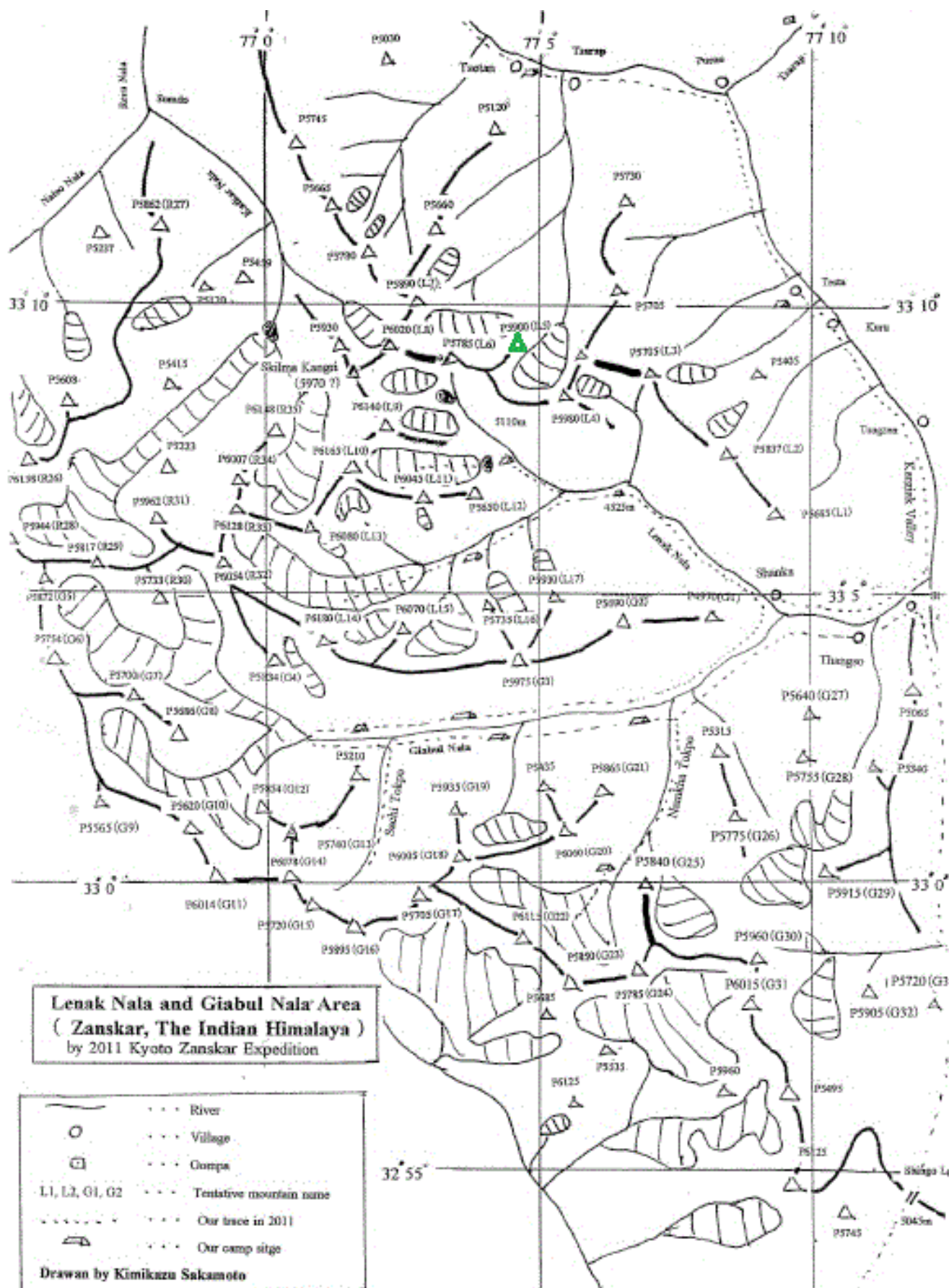


*Above left: Sketch by Kimikazu Sakamoto (2009) with green circle marking the area originally considered.*

*Above right: Google maps view of the location with the same area circled.*

As we continued planning, we discovered another sketch by the later Japanese expedition (see overleaf), which showed this area in its wider context, including the mountains to the south and east. We decided that we should go somewhere where other expeditions definitely hadn't yet explored, such as the long ridge of peaks running NW-SE marked as L6, L5, L4, L3, L2, and L1 all the way to the Lenak Nala. The location we had suggested originally was in the area explored by the Peak Aspect expedition, and was not far from the various Reru explorations. We also read that the road had recently been extended as far as Char on the north side of the river, so we could conceivably get very close to a target valley further south, and have more time in the mountains. We pinpointed L4, L5 and L6 as potential objectives accessed from

the village of Surle, west of Char, accessible by one of several bridges en route (including at Anmo and one at Testan). Although the plan was valid, our reliance on good road access to reach this more southern valley turned out to be an oversight as all of these bridges were gone, as were parts of the road.



Sketch of region by Kimikazu Sakamoto, with L5 marked in green. Surle is located at 77° 5'.



## 1.4 TRAINING

Training was an important part of our expedition planning. Due to the team members living in dispersed locations, most of the training was done on an individual basis. A communal log of activity was kept to enable goal-setting and to add a competitive aspect to individual fitness training. One team trip was made in early summer to Skye, where we scrambled on the Cuillin and practiced emergency response procedures, first aid and general rope work.



## 2. JOURNEY

### 2.1 ETHOS

The ethos of the expedition was to be minimalist and independent, and to have minimal impact on the environment we passed through.

Very little was arranged prior to our arrival in Leh, and no middle men were enlisted in the course of the expedition. We would much rather pay the supplier than his agent, both for the enhanced flexibility and control offered and because this way, we see our money going directly to local people. This worked wonderfully – transport, supplies and more was offered to us in the streets of Leh, Kargil, Padum and Reru. We used no agents, porters, cooks or musicians, and ad hoc support was readily available at a fair price.

Although we had intended to gather local food and supplies in the region prior to establishing base camp, our own gastronomic reticence held us back. Due to the short window of time we would have in the mountains, we decided that the success of the expedition should not be compromised by the possibility of upset stomachs. As a result, we ate locally until we struck out on foot. Thereafter, we ate only home-made flapjacks (10kg) and dried meals; and drank only water with iced tea powder.

*Pictured overleaf: a colourful Tata truck (one of our expedition vehicles) at Reru.*





GOODS

J&K PU NJABI  
JK 16  
1237  
UPDHA  
RSTHA



ZIYAN  
SUZIAN

PERMIT  
CAR RIER  
HAPYA NA DLI  
BENGA LASSAM  
GUJRAT AD MP

TATA  
1616  
EURO

FAIRDEAL MOTORS & WORKS  
JAMMU & KASHMIR

MASHA ALI

TATA  
1616

COME

KUCHAY  
EXPRESS

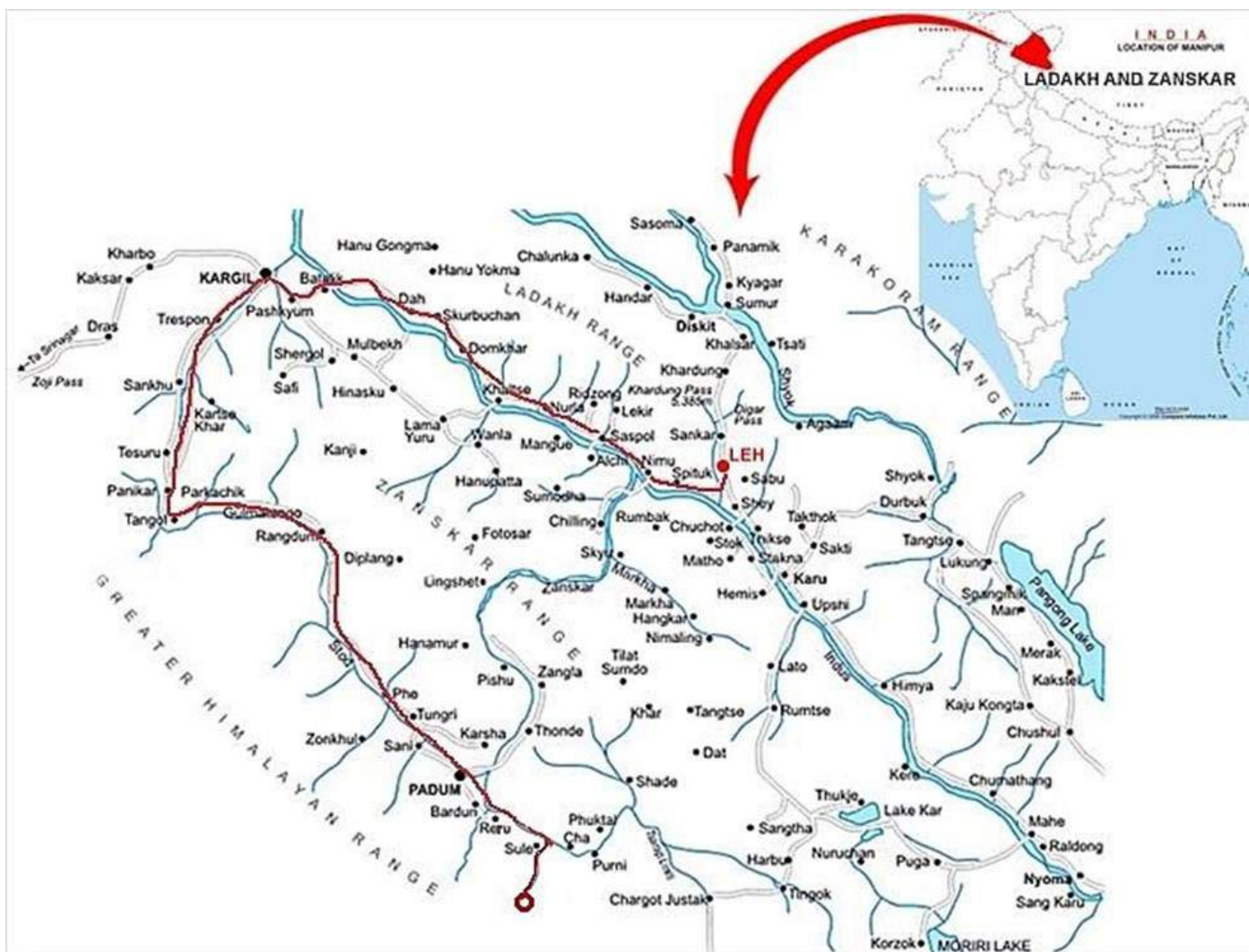
SAKE OF LIVING





## 2.2 ROUTE

The expedition took place during August and early September, 2015. The team met in Leh and travelled in various cars / jeeps from there to Reru, which was as far as we could travel in a vehicle. We then walked for several days until we reached the Surle Puh valley, where a base camp was established. The route is summarised below:



*Full route highlighted in red, with base camp indicated by red circle.*

## 2.3 LOGISTICS

Our logistics were focused on efficiency and quality in all outcomes. Learning from past experiences, we packed the greatest number of calories and value-adding items of outdoor equipment into small packs, while keeping the weight low so that we could walk at a good pace and penetrate further into the mountains. Several of the key logistical themes are described below:

### Currency

The currency of India is the Indian Rupee (INR), and there were around 98 rupees to the pound at the time of the expedition. Rupees can only be obtained in India, so this was a priority on arrival. We expected to be able to exchange sterling cash for rupees consistently in different places, but at times this was difficult and we found ourselves running low on cash. It is possible to change currencies in Leh, but not in Kargil. Kargil has two working but temperamental ATMs.

### Weather / climate

The Greater Himalaya / Zaskar ranges are high-altitude, mountainous semi-desert environments, with extensive glaciers and permanent snow cover in places. The mountains act as a climatic barrier protecting Ladakh and Zaskar from most of the Indian monsoon, resulting in a pleasantly warm and dry climate in the summer. When we travelled, in August, rain and snowfall were infrequent, and the daily maximum temperature was around 35°C in the valleys (which are still at high altitude) and the coldest experienced was estimated as minus 15°C during the night between 5,200m and 6,000m. This temperature range was manageable with layering of clothes. The area is not renowned for high winds but we did experience quite chilling winds at base camp. The cooking area was reinforced by building up mud and rocks, and the tent was pitched in an indentation in the moraine. Tent repairing equipment was carried but was not required.

### Maps

We had several maps of the area including the Olizane editions (Zaskar South 1:150,000 / Zaskar and Nubra Valley 1:200,000). As these are trekking maps, their information was supplemented by terrain information from Google maps and the useful sketches by Mr Sakamoto and other previous expeditions. All maps were duplicated and copies laminated.

### Visas

Visas are required for British citizens visiting India, and each of us got a single-entry tourist visa.

### Permissions and permits

It is our understanding that no mountain permits are required for climbing below 6,000m in altitude. We intended to climb up to c.5,900m as marked on the sketches from previous expeditions. We were in contact with the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) to clarify during the planning stage.

### Expedition medicine

We carried a very comprehensive medical kit, including analgesics and antibiotics. This was divided

between the four rucksacks. On excursions from base camp we carried a stripped-down first aid kit using duplicates of items (where possible), maintaining redundancy in case of loss of kit. Although some medical items can be purchased in Leh (Diamox was available over the counter), there is no reliable source in Padum. All of our medical kit was brought from the UK.

### High altitude medicine / altitude sickness

We took care to acclimatise and not to rush in excitement. Altitude affected us all in different ways and at different stages. As a team, we dealt with two cases of dizziness / headaches affecting individuals: once by descending slightly and resting for half a day; and once by stopping to camp and being careful to keep the individual hydrated. At no point was any member of the team sick due to altitude.

### Travel health / vaccinations

NHS Fitfortravel indicated the north of India to be a low risk zone for Malaria. It recommended that no vaccinations were necessary for India except for ensuring that primary vaccinations and boosters are up to date for the UK, including tetanus. To avoid mosquito and other bug bites, we carried spray deterrent for use when there were insects, but found that insects were not a major distraction. We considered rabies vaccinations as possibly advisable, given the remoteness, and two of the team brought their rabies vaccinations up to date.

### Nutrition

We all tried to gain a small amount of additional weight in preparation for the trip, to give better insulation and additional energy. The success was mixed - unfortunately Struan was unable to control himself and became ill due to over-eating in the week preceding the trip. We logged our weights leading up to departure, and ensured that we were in good physical condition. In the mountains, we budgeted food consumption at about 4,000 calories per day, in a rough breakdown of 35% fat, 40% carbohydrates and 25% protein. This is a higher percentage of fat than normal, but fat is energy-dense (over twice as much as protein / carbohydrates), and this diet had worked well for us on previous expeditions. Large amounts of carbohydrates, in the form of oats, were built into our diet which consisted of buttery flapjacks and dried ration packs. We found that our appetites diminished at altitude (especially above 5,000m) and so some of our supplies were surplus and used to feed the expedition dog. We usually didn't have a defined lunch stop, instead eating small quantities of flapjack at regular intervals and then having a large dinner. We added soy mince and salt to our evening meals to increase protein intake and to help rehydration.



### Environmental impact

We attempted to mitigate our environmental impact as much as possible. Solid human waste was disposed of by burying away from water sources, and toilet paper was burned. Liquid waste was disposed of locally away from water sources, and to save weight and reduce even minor pollution, no soap or cleaning liquid was used on the expedition (we only had one pan anyway, and nobody wasted space by bringing crockery). Batteries were returned to the UK for disposal. The fuel we had left over was given to a traveller when we returned to Leh. Plastic waste was removed and disposed of in Padum, and all remaining waste was burned.

### Water

Water was sourced from streams and we didn't have to melt snow. This water was purified and sometimes boiled as well. Maintaining high levels of hydration was very important due to the heat and height, and so we each consumed 4-6 litres daily.

### Fuel

We carried two liquid multi-fuel stoves, which are usually fast and efficient. We expected these to operate effectively at low temperatures and at altitude, but the stoves performed poorly throughout the trip. This may have been due to the poor quality of the paraffin sourced in Padum (petrol has burned well for us in the past), but the stoves were certainly less reliable at altitude than at lower levels.

### Clothing and footwear

We dressed appropriately for the conditions, layering clothes as one might for Scottish winter. Although it was cold, double boots weren't necessary. We took care to protect skin and eyes from the sun by applying sun / lip cream and wearing CAT 4 sunglasses, especially from base camp upwards as the sun was reflecting off snow and ice.

### Tents

We used a 4-man North Face tent which has been used on previous expeditions. All of us brought ¾-length closed-cell foam mats, as opposed to inflatable mats, as these insulate effectively and are at no risk of puncturing on rocky terrain. We each brought one expedition-grade goose down sleeping bag. Two bivvy bags were taken in case of emergency, or if climbing required them, but these weren't used.

### Glacial travel / climbing equipment

Harnesses, ice axes and crampons were brought, along with a file to allow the metal gear to be kept sharp and in top condition. Half ropes were brought for large glacial sections and ascents, to minimise weight

while still allowing reasonable distances to be crossed as a group. A well-equipped rack with several light-weight ice screws was brought for ice sections on ascents. Surveying and climbing was carried out in pairs and in a trio, with one person at base camp while others were away, to maximise safety and redundancy.

### Communications

Wherever possible, all members of the team remained within line of sight or shouting distance of each other. We did not encounter any instance of high winds impeding communication. Unfortunately, satellite phones are illegal in India. Notices about their illegality were pasted prominently in cafés in Padum and Leh. Several mobile phones were carried, and we were very careful to conserve batteries (we also took a solar charger). However, none of the phones received signal outside of Padum and so we had no means of communication on the walk-in, or while at base camp. We would only have been able to communicate for assistance by descending and retreating at least to Surle, if not further. We arranged for a UK expedition coordinator to monitor external factors, assist us in arrangements and keep us informed with weather updates, but we were unable to maintain contact with them at all in the absence of a satellite phone.



## 3. LOCATION

### 3.1 SOUTHERN ZANSKAR

The Zaskar region in Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), is a remote, mountainous and poor region in the far north of India. Some maps show the Zaskar region as within Ladakh, others show it on its close western edge. The 'Zaskar' and 'Ladakh' mountain ranges are certainly separate, but the mountains south of Padum are perhaps better described as the edge of the Greater Himalaya, as opposed to Zaskar range further east. The name Ladakh means 'Land of the High Passes' and is the highest plateau of the J&K province. The remoteness of the area appealed to us, as did its impressive mountain geography and interesting culture. It offered many prospects for mountaineering 'firsts'.

The majority of people in the region are Tibetan Buddhists, with a large concentration of Shia Muslims in the Kargil district. The population outside of the major towns live in remote farming settlements. The principal spoken language is Ladakhi, a Tibetan language, but Hindi, Urdu and very often English are also spoken by those who have been educated. There are strong Tibetan influences on the region, but the combination of different ethnicities and religious groups makes the culture very unique.

As of 2015, there had been no significant conflict in the area for several years. There was terrorist activity in the region in the mid-1990s, which adversely impacted tourism for many years (particularly in the west, in and between the cities of Srinagar and Jammu). At the time of our trip, the FCO highlighted several areas to which travel is not discouraged, and this included the entire region of Ladakh. The area has a history of substantial disruption due to adverse and freak weather - such as major landslides and flooding in 2010, and again in early summer 2015.





*Above: the menace yak, moments before it charged our camp.*

*Below: the track south of Reru, brushed away by a landslide.*









### 3.2 MOUNTAIN ACCESS

The road quality in Zaskar varied somewhat, but it was never too far from ‘bumpy track’. Much of the drive from Leh to Kargil, and some way south of Kargil, was on tarmac. However, this gave way to dirt track somewhere around Panikhar, for the remaining 12-14 hours’ drive to Reru. We were surprised to pass enormous, multi-coloured (beautifully decorated by hand) Tata lorries everywhere along the way. These vehicles trundle heavily over precarious rocky outcrops and along hairpin bends, transporting general cargoes around the region. We hitched a lift in one on the way back to Padum and the driver had nerves of steel. We were reduced to quivering wrecks as we sat in the cab, peering over ludicrous cliffs to the frothing river below.

The main barrier to accessing the mountains is that occasionally, floods or landslides wash away bridges and very large sections of roads. The villages south of Reru were inaccessible by vehicle as a result of this, and locals were transporting their supplies to the villages on foot and with ponies, along narrow paths. This meant that we couldn’t get to the target valley by road – instead we walked in, following a path above the river. A reassuring point on access is that some villages have their own (government-provided) JCB / diggers, and these can be deployed quickly to clear smaller landslides. We had one cleared in front of us south of Panikhar, but the destruction south of Reru was beyond anything that could be fixed by a few JCBs. The reconstruction of the bridges and road along the Tsarap river south of Reru may take several years.

From Reru, we walked south-east for c.15km, along a path on the south side of the Tsarap river. The path was narrow and undulated along the cliffs, resulting often in very significant drops to the river. There were also loose scree sections and overhangs. At one point we placed gear and belayed to traverse a particularly loose section of path over a particularly steep, high cliff. Although the locals were quite



confident using the path, we were in no doubt that the extremely exposed walk in was more dangerous than our mountaineering exploits. We took the walk in slowly and carefully, and rested during the mid-day peak heat. We reached the village of Surle after two days, and continued due south through the village



and up into the large valley behind it. Our base camp near the glacier was only c.8km south of Surle (in the Surle Puh valley, which is the eastern fork of the valley), but this involved continuous ascent to 5,200m and so it took 2.5 days.

In terms of who else was accessing the mountains, we were told almost everywhere we went that this town, village or valley was 'a very popular tourist place'. Perhaps the locals were suggesting that now we had arrived it must be popular – in any case, we saw very few 'tourists' outside of Leh, and we only met one man and his ponies on the walk in to the mountains. In fact, he passed us several times at great speed, shouting "slowly, slowly!" (see picture overleaf). We found that people were friendlier in the remote villages far from Leh and Kargil, but the locals were not especially interested in our plans, and hospitality never exceeded a cup of tea.



*Above: Our walking route from Reru (north west starting point) to base camp (yellow spot) in the Surle Puh valley. Total distance c.24km.*







### 3.3 BASE CAMP

Our valley is known locally as the Surle Puh. We established base camp at the foot of a lumpy moraine field at 5,200m. We had to stop at this point because some of the team were feeling the effects of altitude and needed to rest, although a more suitable camp site was identified slightly further south at 5,300m. The moraine (and base camp) was much more exposed to the wind than areas even just 100m lower down, as the wind seemed to funnel straight down the glacier. It was therefore very cold when windy, and hot when the sun was out and there was no breeze. We dug out and flattened a space and tucked our tent into the gap in the earth and rocks, not far from a stream flowing off the ice of 'L5' high above.



*Above: Base camp nestled into the moraine - left hand photo shows the main glacier to rear, and L4 hidden in clouds. Below: looking north from the lower Surle Puh valley.*





## 4. MOUNTAINS

We climbed and explored as a trio with one person as support at base camp. Our routes were planned visually and using maps, and we scouted out suitable routes by exploring at lower levels and using a zoom lens to look upwards. Weather conditions during our stint at base camp were mixed. A weather reporter would summarise it well with “sunny spells interspersed with (everything else)”. There were sunny periods, but also some snow, light hail and mist, and low clouds drifting over frequently which led to general uncertainty about conditions. Temperatures during the night were sufficiently cold to freeze the terrain well for approaches over ice. We made one ascent which we understand to be the first, and made an attempt on another peak but were unable to complete it. Both peaks were among those identified and numbered by the Kyoto Zanskar expedition.

### 4.1 SGURR A MHADAIDH FUAR / ‘L5’ (5,897m) - ASCENT

We walked south over the moraine and passed under the large black and white glacier which hangs frighteningly off the summit plateau. Progress over the moraine was slow in the dark because it undulates considerably and there were some snow bridges and ice sections near rivers which were best avoided. We proceeded steeply up to the left of the L5 ‘glacier zone’, over scree and ice patches on a slope which became increasingly steep (to sustained stretches c.45 degrees) for c.500m. Progress was made over both scree and ice (the upper left area of the overhanging glacier), but neither route had much speed or safety advantage over the other. Once all the ice patches were behind us, it was slightly further at a decreasing angle over rocks to the expansive summit plateau.

*Sgurr a Mhadaidh Fuar* (or ‘*Hill of the Cold Hound*’ in Scottish Gaelic) - the peak is named as a tribute to the fifth member of our team, who came along on a whim, and climbed hard and with great agility up to 5,897m without so much as a pair of socks. His English was limited, his personal hygiene questionable, and his continuous shouting during the night was disruptive. But he made it to the top like a true pioneer. We didn’t see him after the ascent - he’s pictured overleaf, snoozing below the mountain.

*Sgurr a Mhadaidh Fuar*  
(5,897m)





## 4.2 ATTEMPT AT L4 (6,000m)

The most prominent mountain visible from base camp to the south was L4, a smooth snowy dome. We attempted it by taking the same route as up to L5 but proceeded left (south) near the top of the scree/ice slope instead of right (north) towards the L5 summit plateau, and skirted on to the ridge. However, clouds drifted in from the south, and on the approach further along the ridge we judged that we would not be able to reach the summit and return safely before either nightfall or the clouds descending fully on the summit. Given more time, we would have been very keen for a second attempt at this peak. Unfortunately we had to descend the next day and so this mountain remains for the taking. If attempting it again, we would establish an advanced base camp not necessarily higher, but further south up the valley (above the main glacier) than our own, in order to minimise approach time over the moraine. We found that the climb just to reach the ridge from our base camp took more time and energy than expected. An alternative to the scree approach to the ridge could also be considered seriously, although there was evidence of full-depth avalanches in sections underneath the ridge.







*Above: Google maps view of routes - right-hand line shows route from base camp (yellow spot) to the summit of Sgurr a Mhadaidh Fuar / L5, above the overhanging glacier. Left-hand line shows deviation and route to the ridge of L4. Descents were made over the same ground.*



*Above: McLellan on the summit plateau of Sgurr a Mhadaidh Fuar / L5, looking to the ridge line of L4.*





*Above: the approach to the overhanging glacier and main route.*

*Below: the view beyond L4, towards L3, L2 and L1.*



## 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are very grateful for the support of the Alpine Club, the Mount Everest Foundation and the BMC. Our thanks also go to the people who helped in planning, and 'in the field' throughout the expedition:

- Antonia Wade (UK Expedition Coordinator)
  - Kamal (Zambala Hotel, Padum)
  - Dr Simon Green
-



## APPENDIX A - ROUTE LOG / DIARY

**15<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> August** – McLellan flies from Edinburgh, Sam from Aberdeen. McLellan's bag is lost in transit and this is not good as it contains a good deal of climbing gear and the first aid kit, but thankfully the airline delivers it the next day. A day later, Nicoll flies from London, Struan from Australia.

**17<sup>th</sup> August** – Struan and Calum Nicoll arrive in Leh in the morning. McLellan and Sam have a taxi waiting. We drive to Kargil, which takes 6 hours - the driver is in a rush. The Leh taxi driver cannot go further than Kargil, so we pile our gear at the roadside and two of us try and arrange another lift while two protect the gear from crowds of excited children and young men. The only person who doesn't appear eager to steal our bags is a policeman directing the traffic.

The Kargil taxi drivers' rates are fixed and negotiation doesn't get far. (We found out later that this is a cartel arrangement. Best to avoid if possible – taxis can be secured much cheaper if arranged outside of the Kargil cartel, and our private vehicle on the return leg was almost half the price.) A driver agrees to take us as far as Panikhar that afternoon. We stay at Panikhar overnight in a guest house and eat home-made Dal and rice. We stay up late arranging gear into equal weighted packs. Sam is reprimanded for taking up useful rucksack space with frivolities like a change of pants and a pair of 'approach shoes'.

**18<sup>th</sup> August** – Drive to Padum takes 14 hours, and 2 hours from there to Reru. We have breakfast in a tea hut where a man is weighing a chicken while reporting its weight to a friend on his iphone. Early in the journey, a landslide is cleared by JCBs close in front of us. Our vehicle is slow and engine problems develop towards the end of the day. The mountainous scenery is stunning all the way. In Padum, we search for petrol for the stoves, but none is available and even the petrol station has run out. We end up having dinner in the Zambala hotel, run by Kamal. Kamal is incredibly helpful – he sources paraffin for us and arranges a lift for us in a jeep after dinner, to Reru, in the dark. We learn that the road used to go as far as Char but it was washed away, along with the connecting bridges, a couple of months ago. From Reru onwards we will have to go on foot. We camp at Reru and are kept awake for half the night by dogs barking.

**19<sup>th</sup> August** – Start of walk in. A sturdy brown dog is curled up outside our tent when we wake up. He is friendly and follows us from then on. The going is slow due to altitude, heat and heavy packs. We follow the track on the south side of the Tsarap, which deteriorates to a path c.3km from Reru. Suddenly the track explodes 50 metres ahead of us – it turns out there is a group of government road-builders blasting it with dynamite (there are no warning signs)! We only walk as far as Y Char by nightfall, and set up camp on a flat plain slightly above the river. The dog starts barking madly after dinner and we see a set of animal

eyes some distance away. Twenty minutes later, a yak approaches the tent and charges when it is startled by our torches. We grab the ice axes and go towards the yak, throwing rocks until it retreats. Struan's aim is appalling – throws a rock behind the yak so that it charges at us again. It headbutts the dog but we are unscathed.

**20<sup>th</sup> August** – Continuing along the path, it gets very exposed and at one point the rocks slide under Sam's feet, so we place gear and belay everyone else across this loose section. We are forced to conserve water overnight as the camp site is so high above the river and there are no streams. The dog is barking again all night although this time we didn't see the yak or any other intruder.

**21<sup>st</sup> August** – We reach Surle in the morning. A man called Andus is harvesting his field and invites us for tea – we recognise him as we gave him biscuits the previous night when he walked past our camp. He says the valley is called 'Surle Puh', but the western branch has another name – 'Surle (something else)'. We camp at c.4,500m just below a shieling where Andus grazes his cattle. From here we can see the northern buttress of 'L5' and it looks bulky, covered in loose rocks. We aim to make a base camp the next day as time is going fast. There are numerous yaks but the dog seems to have got used to them by this stage and we enjoy a rare quiet night's sleep.

**22<sup>nd</sup> August** – We push on south, although our pace continues to deteriorate as we get higher. McLellan feels weak, so we take a long rest during the day - with a cooked lunch, plenty of water and a nap - and are only able to reach 4,800m by nightfall.

**23<sup>rd</sup> August** – Base camp established. Nicoll is dizzy and needs to rest at 5,200m. McLellan and Struan scout out a better camp location at 5,300m but we maintain the original position. Nicoll's symptoms stabilise so we do not descend.

**23<sup>rd</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> August** - Climbing. While at base camp, we drink hot iced tea as it is easier to drink than cold purified foggy meltwater, and each pot is delicious. Two days are wasted - cloud then a mild blizzard sweeps in intermittently – we experience hail, snow, sun, rain and mist all in one day. We make it up to the summit of L5 after having tested some of the route in daylight the previous day. Crossing the moraine in darkness is harder than expected – both to navigate and to cross safely. At 3am, only an hour after setting off, Struan loses his footing crossing a stream and gets one leg wet. He changes his sock which does the job of keeping his foot dry, but soon the trouser leg is frozen solid. Temperature around -15°C during the night with no breeze. Another day, we are forced to retreat from L4 after starting on its ridge – clouds over the summit, and too much time and energy is spent on the climb to the ridge – extremely disappointing. The dog isn't seen again after the descent from L5.



**30<sup>th</sup> August** – We descend and bivvy out above Surle. There are hundreds of thin spiders causing havoc nearby but we manage to sleep.

**31<sup>st</sup> August** – Andus passes us no less than three times today on his way to and from Reru with his horses. He goes at a tremendous pace. We think it's a wonder he didn't pass us at the top of the mountain. We bivvy out not far from Reru.

**1<sup>st</sup> September** – By eleven o' clock we are in Reru, thumbing for a lift. The only vehicle going anywhere is a huge Tata truck, hand painted in bright colours and with a dove of peace painted on the side. All of our bags are piled onto the roof, and we squeeze into the driver's cab along with the driver and his friend. Two terrifying hours later we're in Padum. We spend the afternoon feasting in the various restaurants and tea shops of Padum, and base ourselves at the Zambala hotel. In the afternoon the streets are bustling with a huge crowd of schoolchildren and soldiers on a joint parade to combat litter. They chant and march and wave flags with anti-litter slogans, then finish off with an energetic street sweep! They bin all the rubbish, but they leave us with Calum Nicoll.

**2<sup>nd</sup> September** – Kamal sources a lift for us but the driver specifies that he needs a long lie in before setting off – we don't mind that at all. The drive to Kargil takes only 10 hours in this superior carriage. Overnight in Kargil.

**3<sup>rd</sup> September** – We decide that a bus journey to Leh "can't be that much worse" than a private taxi, for a fraction of the price. This is the worst decision of the trip. The bus journey is worse than horrific. We haven't booked in advance, the bus is full, and we spend 9 hours in the driver's cab, cross-legged or similar - all together, 8 people plus the driver and no seats. Undoubtedly the worst journey we have had in our lives, and the rest of the day is spent recovering from the ordeal in a guest house in Leh.

**4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> September** – The team scatters and each of us flies home by various routes.

## APPENDIX B - KIT LIST

Category	Item	Quantity
<b>CLIMBING</b>	60 cm slings	8
	240cm sling	2
	Short quickdraws	6
	Long quickdraws	4
	Crabs	7
	Screw gates	5
	Set of Cams with Crabs	5
	Rope	2 x 50m halves
	Threaders	3
	Ice screws	10
	Pitons	2
	Bulldog	2
	Tat	15m
	Ice axe	5
	Assorted rack (nuts etc.)	1
<b>SHELTER</b>	Yellow 4-man tent	1
	Tent repair kit	1
	Pegs	14
	Plastic bags (for tent anchors in snow)	10
	Tentatious tape	1
	Bivvy bags	2
<b>COOKING</b>	Large light pan	1
	Liquid fuel stove	2
	Stove repairkit	1
	Fuel bottles	2L
	Match boxes / ignition source	4
	Water Purification tablets	300L
	Windshield for stove	2
	2L water bottles	8
<b>TOOLS</b>	Leatherman	2
	Allen key for crampons	1
	Wire (general repairs)	1
	Superglue	1
	Knife	2
<b>NAVIGATION</b>	Maps	2
	Overview of Leh-Padum (road)	2
	Compass	4
	GPS	1
	Padum high quality mountain maps	6
	Print-outs of target location	4
<b>FOOD</b>	Flapjack	10kg
	Rehydration fluids	1kg
	Chocolate biscuits	5kg
	Olive oil	2kg
	Iced tea powder	2kg
	Dried meals	60
<b>POWER</b>	Portable power pack	1
	AA Batteries	10
	AAA Batteries	20
<b>CAMERA</b>	Canon 600d body	1
	24-105mm lens	1
	10-20mm lens	1
	Batteries	5
	Memory cards	5
	Flash	1
<b>FIRST AID</b>	First Aid kit	1
<b>EMERGENCY</b>	Copy of passport	2
	Copy of insurance	1
	List of numbers for local helicopter companies	3
	List of taxi phone numbers	2
	Copy of flight tickets	1
	Copy of visa	2
	Mobile phone	4



## APPENDIX C - FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The expedition costs were lower than we had anticipated. This was largely due to there being four team members rather than the five planned for; costs in India being significantly cheaper than budgeted for; and low expenditure on specialised equipment. Some new climbing gear was purchased by individuals but these items are not included in the financial statement.

Item	Cost	Number	Total cost
<b>INDIA</b>			
Visas	£ 125.00	4	£ 500.00
AAC Insurance	£ 36.00	4	£ 144.00
Admin / postage etc.	£ 80.00	1	£ 80.00
<b>TOTAL INDIA</b>			<b>£ 724.00</b>
<b>TRANSPORT</b>			
Flights	£ 900.00	4	£ 3,600.00
Taxi Leh - Kargil	£ 70.00	1	£ 70.00
<i>Overnight Kargil</i>	£ 8.00	1	£ 8.00
Taxi Kargil - Padum	£ 135.00	1	£ 135.00
Taxi Padum - Reru	£ 18.00	1	£ 18.00
Taxi Reru - Padum	£ 2.00	1	£ 2.00
<i>Overnight Padum</i>	£ 10.00	1	£ 10.00
Taxi Padum - Kargil	£ 80.00	1	£ 80.00
<i>Overnight Kargil</i>	£ 10.00	1	£ 10.00
Bus Kargil - Leh	£ 4.50	4	£ 18.00
<i>Overnight Leh</i>	£ 13.00	2	£ 26.00
Miscellaneous taxis	£ 30.00	1	£ 30.00
<b>TOTAL TRANSPORT</b>			<b>£ 4,007.00</b>
<b>FOOD</b>			
Ration packs	£ 5.00	60	£ 300.00
Flapjack (10 kg)	£ 26.00	1	£ 26.00
Iced tea powder etc.	£ 38.00	1	£ 38.00
Dining in India	£ 147.00	1	£ 147.00
<b>TOTAL FOOD</b>			<b>£ 511.00</b>
<b>CLIMBING</b>			
Ice screws	£ 35.00	2	£ 70.00
Maps	£ 17.85	2	£ 35.70
Kerosene (2L)	£ 2.00	1	£ 2.00
First Aid equipment	£ 160.00	1	£ 160.00
Tent repair materials	£ 14.00	1	£ 14.00
<b>TOTAL CLIMBING</b>			<b>£ 281.70</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPEDITION</b>			<b>£ 5,523.70</b>