

Unexplored Karakoram 2015

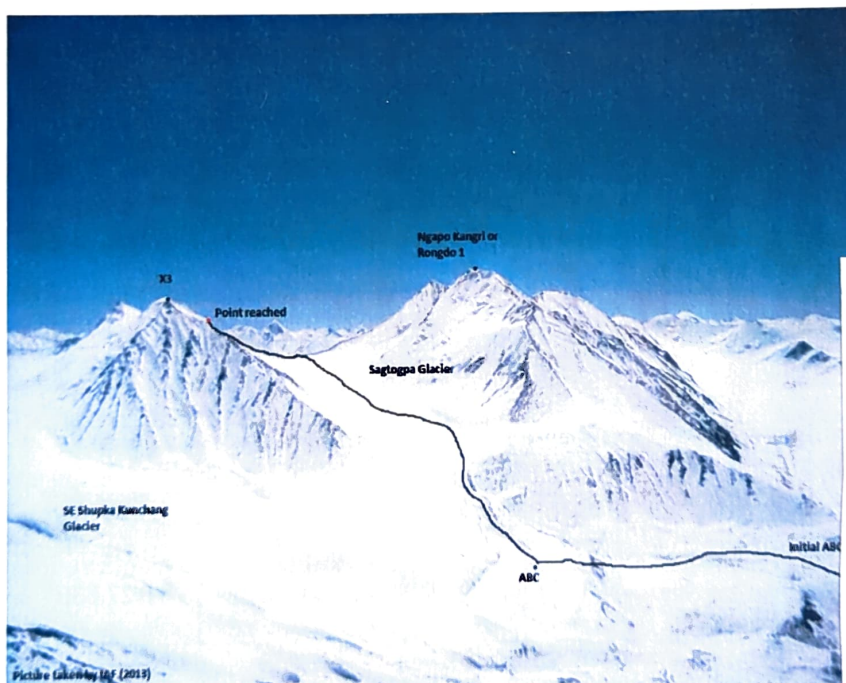
Summary

The aim of this 28-day expedition (supported by the BMC and MEF) was to explore the upper SE Shukpa Kunchang and Sagtogpa Glaciers within the Rongdo valley and to attempt to climb at least one unclimbed 6000m+ peak. The team had identified Peak X3 as their main objective. The necessary permissions were received from the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) four weeks prior to departure – this was a major hurdle overcome, given the restrictions in this part of the Karakoram.

Once in country some members of the team suffered from the high altitude but over time this resolved itself. The weather experienced during the expedition was somewhat poor and this affected the climbing aspect and the objectives achieved.

After establishing Advanced Base Camp (ABC) at 5430m, a summit attempt of Peak X3 was made on the 08/07/15. The team ventured onto the unexplored Sagtogpa Glacier where progress was hampered by poor snow conditions, although the conditions did improve as the team gained height. The team reached the col between Ngapo Kangri and Peak X3, which we named Nagpo Col (Black Col). From here, an attempt at the south east ridge was made. Five members of the expedition reached a high point of 6050m, approximately 150m below the summit, before turning around due to the approaching bad weather. The weather remained poor at Base Camp (BC) for the next six days preventing any further summit attempts.

The below topographic shows Peak X3 and the Sagtogpa Glacier with the route that the team took from ABC.



Expedition Report Collection

6085

Expedition team



Expedition Leader: Ed Poulter

Climbing members: Andrew Basford, Katie Farrell, Mathew Fuller, Steve Hutton, Katie McKay, Dan Slome.

Liaison Officer: Munesh Kumar Kulshrestha

Support team: Sherpas – Desal Stanzin, Tsering Sherpa, Samgyal Sherpa, Migmia Tenba.

Basecamp cooks – Sanber Sherpa, Dawa Jeba, Rigzin Mamhail.

Horsemen – Tsewang Samphel, Tsering Doojey

Expedition aim

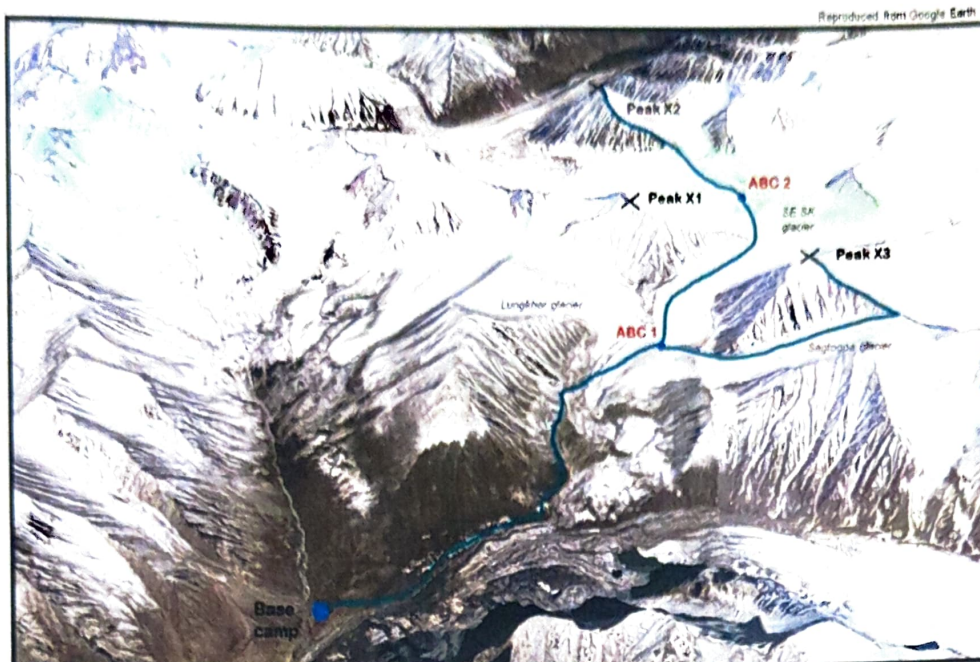
The aim of the expedition was to venture on to the unexplored upper SE Shukpa Kunchang and Sagtogpa Glaciers in the Rongdo valley and attempt to climb at least one unclimbed 6000m+ peak.

Two peaks were identified as possible objectives for the expedition with Peak X3 being the main objective:

Peak	Height (m)	Longitude	Latitude
X2 (south east ridge)*	6150*	34.34'34.93N	77.59'14.65E
X3 (south east ridge via the Sagtogpa Glacier)*	6100	34.31'53.16N	78.0'27.88E

*The reason the peaks are labelled X2/X3 is because our initial objective X1 was found to have been climbed previously by a Canadian expedition and to avoid confusion we labelled subsequent objectives X2 and X3.

Satellite image of our intended ascent routes.



Expedition

The expedition took place between 21/06/15 – 18/07/2015.

The team flew from the UK on the evening of 21/06/15, arriving in Delhi the following morning. A day was spent in Delhi in order to visit the IMF to be assigned our liaison officer, Munesh Kumar Kulshrestha. An early morning flight was caught from Delhi on the 23/06/15 to Leh.

Five days were spent in Leh making final preparations for the expedition and acclimatising by walking up to the Shanti Stupa and to the Old Fort. We also had time to visit a local Buddhist festival in Hemis (3600m) approximately 1hr drive from Leh.

After these five days the expedition team travelled in 4x4's to Rongdo via the Khardung La. One team member suffered from the altitude at the beginning of the expedition which meant that they (and another member) had to spend two further nights in Rongdo (3200m) to recover but managed to catch up with the rest of the team at Fatha (4250m). A steady ascent profile was followed up the valley to BC.

After six days the team arrived at BC (4800m) on 03/07. The team established an initial ABC at 5200m on 04/07 but moved this to 5430m just below the SE Shukpa Kunchang Glacier the following day after a recce of the Sagtogpa Glacier. The Sagtogpa Glacier appeared free of crevasses and the col at its head looked straightforward to access.

Once ABC was established the group returned to BC for a rest day, as the high altitude was affecting several members of the group, before making a summit attempt.

ABC at 5430 with Peak X3 center left.



On 07/07, six members of the team departed from BC on their first summit attempt of Peak X3 (6100m). After a night at ABC the group set off at midnight, one member appeared to be suffering from altitude sickness so stayed at the tents. The summit team consisted of Ed Poulter, Andrew Basford, Katie McKay, Mathew Fuller and head Sherpa, Desal Stanzin.

The team followed the Sagtoga Glacier to Nagpo Col, the snow conditions were poor to begin with and an avalanche crack was triggered 10 minutes after leaving camp but, as the team progressed up the glacier, the snow conditions improved. Route finding was straightforward. The team took four hours to reach Nagpo Col (no bergschrund present) arriving at 4am. The team then made an attempt of the south east ridge which was corniced and looked steep. Good progress was made along the ridge; terrain consisted of short snow ramps of 50 / 60 degrees. The team reached a height of 6050m before turning around due to approaching bad weather. The summit was estimated to be 150m higher at 6200m, approximately 1.5hrs climbing from this point. The team returned to ABC and after a short rest descended to BC that afternoon to recover and prepare for another summit attempt.

Unexplored Karakoram Expedition Report

Looking from Nagpo Col down the Ryang Kharu Togpo – many of these summits remain virgin



Climbing along the south east ridge of Peak X3



Descending the south east ridge



Descending the Sagtogpa Glacier



On returning to BC, the weather broke the following day with stormy rain. The next summit attempt was postponed until the weather improved.

The full team returned to ABC on 11/07, however, shortly after arriving at camp the weather began to deteriorate again with thick cloud and snow. The team stayed at ABC for two nights during which conditions remained poor. By now time had run out and the group had to return to BC and start the trek down to Rongdo in order to catch international flights back to the UK.

Unexplored Karakoram Expedition Report

Poor weather at ABC – clearing out a gear dump



When climbing on the mountain, an alpine style method was adopted. The approximate grade of the climb was Scottish Winter grade II or Alpine PD.

Peak X3 as we left basecamp



The table below gives an overview of the sleeping locations and heights.

Date	Sleeping location	Altitude (m)	Weather
21/06	London	N/A	N/A
22/06	Delhi	N/A	N/A
23/06	Leh	3400	Cloudy
24/06	Leh	3400	Cloudy / rain
25/06	Leh	3400	Cloudy / sunny
26/06	Leh (Hemis – day trip 3600m)	3400	Sunny
27/06	Rongdo	3200	Sunny
28/06	Thipthi	3800	Sunny
29/06	Fatha	4250	Cloudy / sunny
30/06	Fatha (hot springs day trip 4525m)	4250	Rainy
1/07	Fatha	4250	Rainy
2/07	Hot springs	4525	Rainy / clear
3/07	Base Camp	4800	Sunny
4/07	ABC (1)	5200	Sunny
5/07	Base Camp + Recce to 5600m	4800	Sunny
6/07	Base Camp	4800	Sunny
7/07	ABC (2)	5430	Sunny
08/07	Base Camp (summit attempt 6050m)	4800	Sunny / cloudy
09/07	Base Camp	4800	Cloudy
10/07	Base Camp	4800	Rain
11/07	ABC (2)	5430	Rain / snow
12/07	ABC (2)	5430	Snow
13/07	Base Camp	4800	Snow / rain
14/07	Base Camp	4800	Cloudy / sunny
15/07	Doksa	4000	Sunny
16/07	Leh	3400	Sunny
17/07	Delhi	N/A	N/A
18/07	London	N/A	N/A

The map below indicates the ascent up the Rongdo valley.



Climbing permits / visas

All India visa applications for UK nationals are dealt with by VFS Global, which manages the administrative function of the visa, passport and consular services application process. A phone call to the VFS Global helpline provided the information that an individual team member could apply on behalf of everyone. This task was allocated to Dan as he was based in London.

As the aim of the expedition was to climb virgin peaks in the Rongdo valley it was necessary for us to apply for the appropriate permissions from the IMF in Delhi, for which clearance would need to be granted by the Ministry of Home Affairs. RIMO Expeditions were extremely helpful in working with the IMF to obtain these permissions. The application to the IMF for the permits was submitted on 1st September 2014 and permissions granted on the 15th May 2015.

There are many types of Indian visa, for this expedition each team member required an entry visa, otherwise known as an 'X' visa. A pre-requisite for this visa is an invitation into the country, this may come from a company or organisation, in this case it was the letter from the IMF.

Prior to getting permission from the IMF each expedition member made an initial application online via the VFS Global website, this was completed once the permissions from the IMF had been confirmed (this was done to save time when permissions were granted).

Once permission was granted by the IMF (in May, one month before our departure) Dan booked the necessary appointments at the London based offices and team members

submitted their electronic applications. Dan then went in with seven passports, individual letters from expedition members authorising Dan to act on their behalf, the all-important IMF letter and the visa applications in the hope of being issued with a mountaineering 'X' visa. A few days later we received back our passports and associated visas all ready for departure.

A copy of the letter received from the IMF is included in Appendix 1.

Liaison Officer

The liaison officer assigned to us by the IMF was Munesh Kumar Kulshrestha. The team gelled well with Munesh and he soon became another member of the expedition.

Munesh didn't venture any higher than BC mainly because the soles of his mountaineering boots were becoming detached.

Munesh demonstrating the effectiveness of an umbrella whilst on expedition!



Transport

The expedition team flew to Delhi on Jet Airways who offer a 46kg luggage allowance as standard, this ensured there were no excess baggage costs for the expedition kit.

Delhi airport transfers were organised by RIMO and were in an air-conditioned bus, taking the team to the Paharganj area where the hotel was based. Transfers cost \$50 each way. Tuk Tuks were used to get to the IMF and hailed from outside the hotel, cost 500rps per Tuk Tuk.

In Leh, again all transfers were organised via RIMO. The team travelled by Jeep over the Khardung La to Rongdo (6hrs).

Food

All expedition meals were supplied by RIMO and were of good quality. Expedition members took high-energy bars for summit days.

In Delhi and Leh the team visited many of the nearby local restaurants and sampled Indian and Tibetan cuisine, the food was very tasty and excellent value for money – approx. 200-300rps for one meal.

Equipment

Equipment purchased by the expedition team included:

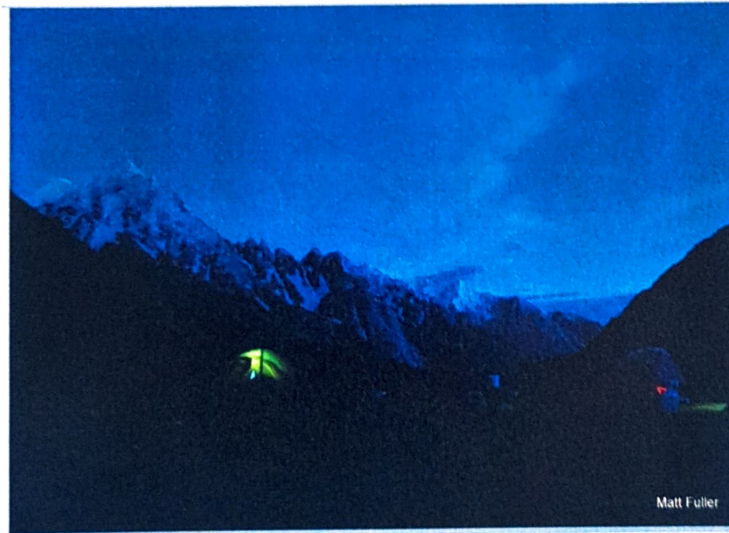
Maps

The expedition team used the Ladakh & Zaskar: Brog-yul, Nubra, Shyog (1:150,000) map. Prior to the expedition, Google Earth was used extensively to identify possible approaches and routes up the selected peaks. ESRI data via the IGIS GIS System was used to obtain spot heights and latitude/longitude grid coordinates, it is worth noting that spot heights in the valley taken using the ESRI data were found to be inaccurate, however, spot heights of the peaks were accurate.

Purification kits

These were obtained from Aqua Prove, based in the Netherlands and are highly recommended for expeditions greater than a week in duration. The kits were very simple to use; a concentrated purification liquid was made up from a single tablet enabling more than 250 liters of water to be treated per kit and there was no after taste. The cost for each kit was around £7.

A Hyperspace at basecamp at dusk



Matt Fuller

Tents

The team decided to purchase new Terra Nova tents for the expedition, two 2-man Quasar tents were ordered direct from the manufacturer and a 3-man Hyperspace tent was purchased from Outside in Hathersage. The tents were very comfortable, provided ample headroom and the high build quality ensured they withstood the rigors of expedition life. Both models have double porches, this offered plenty of storage space, allowed venting and provided easy access. The one downside was their weight, given this they were not ideal for use above ABC.

Stoves

RIMO expeditions supplied these for use above base camp. They were pretty useless. It would have been better to take our own stoves from the UK which would have been more efficient and a lot better / faster at melting snow.

Technical climbing gear

The team purchased two sets of 8.5mm double ropes. Three small climbing racks were taken together with personal crevasse rescue kits.

Personal kit

For much of the time the expedition team tried to keep cool in the intense sun. The UV was the strongest many of the group had experienced before. Hooded lightweight fleeces, base layers and softshells were often worn to keep the sun off. In the evenings, temperatures dropped markedly and down jackets were invaluable.

Summit day was bitterly cold with temperatures around -10 Celsius at the col, the high altitude exacerbated the cold. Team equipment performed well and boots like the Sportiva Batura provided the right mix between warmth and weight. Softshell trousers were favoured rather than salopettes. Waterproof jackets were worn over the top of base and thermal layers; team members used Gortex hard shell and Paramo jackets, both were adequate.

Given the nature of this expedition, there was little need for technical climbing equipment and crampons were worn for only one day out of thirty. An important factor to consider was weight, by keeping weight to a minimum progress was significantly easier.

At this stage the expedition team would like to acknowledge Mountain Equipment for providing the group with a huge amount of clothing and equipment at a large discount; all of which was excellent.

Communications

Due to the remoteness of the Rongdo valley and the use of satellite phones in this part of India being banned, the team decided to take a McMurdo Fastfind Max Series Personal Location Beacon (PLB) and a SPOT device (a GPS one-way satellite messenger device).

The devices

PLB - McMurdo Fastfind Max Series

This was hired from Suffolk Marine Safety and was for emergency use only; the device can only emit an SOS message.

SPOT device - Gen 3 Satellite Messenger

As the team was unable to source the hire of this device an individual team member decided to buy the equipment and keep it after the expedition; total cost was £95 with an additional £115 p.a communications plan. The individual ownership also solved the issues concerning registration. The following two messages were pre-programmed into the device prior to departure from the UK:

"Expedition team is all well and is progressing with the expedition as planned. Next contact attempt within 24 hours"

"Expedition team have summited peak and have all returned safely to basecamp".

The device also had an SOS function that would complement the PLB. A daily "OK" message was sent from this to contacts (two of whom were at RIMO and the other the UK contact) thereby allowing family to track progress and monitor location.

The team decided to take two devices for redundancy; this also allowed the group to split into separate teams if necessary. It was felt that the SPOT device provided additional functionality when compared to the PLB, it performed well with all our messages received successfully in Leh and the UK. It is worth noting that the PLB emits a much stronger signal than the SPOT device and in the event of an emergency may be more reliable to raise alarm.

A communications plan was produced based on guidance given in the Oxford Handbook of Expedition and Wilderness Medicine. This listed key contacts and actions to be taken on receiving an emergency distress. There was also a UK contact who received daily SPOT tracker updates and was available 24/7 to support the team if an emergency situation arose.

Medical

As this was an independent expedition to an isolated area it was important to have a fully comprehensive medical kit. The first hurdle was deciding exactly what to take. Katie Poulter, an Emergency Nurse Practitioner with a broad experience of expedition medicine, compiled the medical kit list. Katie enlisted the help of Dr. David Hillebrandt, an experienced Expedition Medicine Doctor, whose assistance was invaluable. The drugs list was split up into five key areas: altitude, pain relief, allergic reaction, antibiotics, diarrhoea/vomiting and skin/eyes. The aim was to have enough drugs to deal with easily treatable problems on the mountain without having to retreat down the valley.

Acquiring the drugs and medical kit proved to be the second hurdle. The team is indebted to Jagged Globe who very kindly lent the team an unused medical kit. Despite some of the medications being out of date and missing, it made compiling the kit a lot easier. The remaining drugs were acquired on private prescription. All prescription-only drugs had a written protocol that would be followed at all times if any needed to be used. Jim Duff and Peter Gormly's book 'Pocket First Aid and Wilderness Medicine' was also a very useful source for further information. RIMO Expeditions provided an oxygen cylinder and Gamow bag.

As a member of the Upper Wharfedale Fell Rescue Association, Edward Poulter's experience in Trauma Management and First Aid formed a crucial backbone of knowledge. Expedition team member, Katie McKay, had medical training through her job as a qualified Dentist, Katie's knowledge and understanding of different medications and common medical emergencies complemented Ed's experience. Other member's experience of high altitude

made the group well positioned to deal with medical problems.

Thankfully the medical kit was only used on a couple of occasions during the expedition. A course of ciprofloxacin was efficacious in treating a moderate case of diarrhoea/vomiting and Diamox was used with a member suffering from mild AMS and again to aid acclimatisation in a slow acclimatiser.

The importance of a thorough acclimatisation plan was crucial on this expedition with a slow ascent profile up the valley with a 'climb high, sleep low' approach. Despite this some team members still suffered from the effects of altitude. For future expeditions it may be worth considering a pre-expedition trek over one of the high altitude passes to aid the acclimatisation process.

Finances

The following table gives a breakdown of the costs associated with the expedition. Average in-country exchange rates were £1 to 96rps. The group took a combination of Sterling and Dollars (£1 to \$1.56) in cash. Outstanding invoices to RIMO were paid for by credit card, in country and incurred a 3% admin fee.

	Income (£)	Outgoings (£)
Ed	2,013.00	
Katie	2,013.00	
Katie	2,013.00	
Steve	2,013.00	
Dan	2,013.00	
Andrew	2,013.00	
Matt	2,013.00	
BMC	500.00	
MEF	2,000.00	
Flights		5,824.42
Purification		63.36
Tents		401.00
Ropes		74.00
Spot tracker		80.00
PLB		51.10
Medical		75.24
Donation		100.00
IMF fees		797.37
RIMO		8,034.44
Visas		461.16
Charges		13.50
Food		294.28
Transport		71.81
Hotels		82.82
Tips		147.00
Miscellaneous		20.10
Total	16,591.63	16,591.60
<i>BMC insurance - paid individually</i>		<i>398.52</i>

Blog

The team decided to keep a blog to showcase the expedition's preparations and progress prior to departure. Due to the remoteness of the area being visited it was not possible to upload posts while on the expedition. The WordPress site was used as the host and was straightforward to use.

The blog can be accessed via the link - <https://karakoram2015.wordpress.com/>. The blog was a one way for friends and family to keep up to date with developments.

On returning to the UK, Ed Poulter created a short video of the expedition, this can be viewed via YouTube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PQQUU4fS5M>

Further exploration

Appendix 2 contains all the research of the area that was conducted by the team, including previous expedition reports. There is still potential for further exploration in the region, however, a number of the easier peaks have been climbed.

Venturing deep onto the upper SE Shukpa Kunchang remains a feasible option with numerous unclimbed peaks. A Canadian team explored this area in 2014 but didn't climb any of the peaks.

Another option would be to venture onto the Muztagh Glacier from the Kunzang Togpa. Access in summer is limited due to high river levels in the Shyog valley. Of further interest is the Ryong Kharu valley, this looks interesting and would lead up to the Nagpo Col and Peak X3. Access is via the Shyog valley and is therefore dependent on river levels. A team led by Divyesh Muni in 2015 accessed the Ryong Kharu valley and climbed two virgin peaks and crossed the Sagtogpa Col onto the Sagtogpa Glacier into the Rongdo valley. A copy of the report is included at the end of Appendix 2.

In terms of technical climbing there are many options, especially in the lower parts of the Rongdo valley. The picture below features a peak situated westwards from Gazgazri (see map within the IAF expedition report). The approach would be straightforward but stable, cold conditions would be required given its orientation to the sun.

Unclimbed peak westwards of Gazgazri



On any future expeditions I would recommend going in August to allow for as much snow melt to occur which would allow easier access to and faster travel on the glaciers.

Thank you

The expedition team would like to thank:

- Katie Poulter and David Hillebrandt, for their medical advice.
- David Chalmers for being our home contact while we were away and updating our families on our Spot tracker locations.
- The BMC and MEF for their financial support.
- Mountain Equipment, DMM and Terra Nova for their support.

Further contact

For further information please contact Ed Poulter – poultered@hotmail.com

Appendix 1 – IMF letter



Indian Mountaineering Foundation

No. 2514/IMF/TF/2015

15 May 2015

High Commission of India,
London, U.K.

Subject : British expedition to peak Unnamed (6100 M) in J&K
Himalaya by 08 members team from 21.06.2015 to
19.07.2015

Dear Sir,

1. The above expedition has been cleared by Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, vide their letter No. 13026/122/2015-K.III dated 22nd April 2015 and 13th May 2015 (photocopy enclosed).
2. You are requested to kindly issue the "X" Mountaineering Visa" to the under-mentioned members of the expedition :-

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Mr. Edward Poulter | 2. Ms. Katie Farrell |
| 3. Ms. Katherine Poulter | 4. Ms. Katie McKay |
| 5. Mr. Andrew John Basford | 6. Mr. Daniel Slome |
| 7. Mr. Matthew Edward Fuller | 8. Mr. Stephen Peter Hutton |

3. Please acknowledge.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully,

(Raj Kumar Yadav)
Lt Col(Retd.)
Director

Copy to :-

Leader

1. Mr. Edward Poulter - For information and necessary action
U.K. please.
2. M/s Rimo Expeditions
Gurgaon

Appendix 2 – Previous Expeditions to the Rongdo Valley

Extract of the 2012 Canadian Expedition from the Himalayan Club Newsletter 27, June 2013

Rongdo (Rongdu) Valley, first ascents.

East Karakoram

The Rongdo valley was first explored by the Indo-American mountaineering expedition in 2005, led by Divyesh Muni and Don Goodman. This team descended the valley in two days from the Satti area to the north.

This Indian-Canadian team entered the Rongdo valley on 5 August, from the village, following the south side of the river. Base camp was at 4802m, and advanced base at 5181m just below, Ngapo Kangri ('blue sheep' in Ladakhi) or Rongdo I (6350 m).

On the 18th, after several reconnaissance trips, eight members of the team climbed the west sub-summit (6000 m) of Balden Lhamo (named after a female goddess) or Rongdo III. They reached the col between Rongdo III and IV, then continued up the southwest ridge, returning to camp in a 10-hour round-trip.

On the 22nd, six climbers ascended Chamba (the future Buddha, 6170 m) or Rongdo II via the southeast glacier (10 hours round-trip). On the 23rd, Nangang and Joei climbed the upper west rock ridge of Ngapo Kangri to about 60 m below the corniced summit (12hours round-trip). At the same time Andy and Arvind were ascending the same peak via its south-facing slopes, first on talus and rock ledges, then up the avalanche-prone southeast aspect to easier-angled slopes, from which they finally gained the summit (14 hours round-trip).

On the 27th, Arvind, Dawa, Kunzang, and Joei headed up the main glacier to attempt the true summit of Balden Lhamo (6120 m). From a high camp at 5690 m, they reached the col at 6060 m above the icy headwall but retreated in the face of poor weather.

On the 29th, Andy and Nangang left a high camp at 5181m, several kilometres northeast of advanced base, to climb Gazgazri (Ladakhi for the lammergeyer vulture, 6160 m). They ascended the southwest ridge, then traversed onto the icy south face. Several short pitches, the last being 70° hard ice, led to the summit dome, and thence the highest point. They returned to base camp after a 14-hour day.

Members: Dr. Jeff Dolinsky, his wife, Joan, and Joie Seagram, all from Canada, along with Andy Selters (USA). Indian climbers Kunzang Sherpa (Sirdar).

(Joie Seagram, Canada)

CLIMBING IN THE RONGDO VALLEY

We were a modest group of four climbers: Three Canadians (Dr. Jeff Dolinsky, his wife Joan and I) and one American (Andy Selters). In addition, we were accompanied by Kunzang Sherpa (Sirdar), Arvind Raman (LO), Danuru Sherpa (Dawa) and Nangang Bhote, and three camp cooks/support staff: Raj Kumar Rai, Mu Gombu Rai and Chamu Singh. Our climbing objectives were located at the head of a beautiful and remote valley called Rongdo in the Nubra area of Ladakh, lying between the east and west arms of the Shyok river. Tom Longstaff travelled close to what is Rongdo village today (3000 m) while exploring the Siachen glacier and Saltoro areas in 1909. It gave me quite a thrill to look west across the lovely, wide meandering Shyok and imagine Longstaff moving slowly up the opposite bank on his way north – to be so close to his footsteps! Rongdo valley has seen virtually no visitors, save one Indian-American climbing team in 2005 which descended the valley (in two days) from the Satti area due north of Rongdo valley (HJ Vol 62; AAJ Vol 48).

I initially called the four peaks (all just over 6000 m) forming the natural cirque in which we climbed Rongdo I to IV, but we have since applied local names consistent with Tibetan culture which forms the foundation of Ladakhi society. These names are officially registered with the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. From Rongdo village (3000 m) on August 5 we began our walk up Rongdo valley heading northeast, and following the south side of the Rongdo river. Upon reaching the head of the valley we pushed a little higher to establish Base Camp (4802 m) on August 10. Over the next few days we explored higher, trending north-easterly in search of a suitable Advance Base Camp (5181 m), which we established on August 14, just below our main climbing objective Ngapo Kangri or Rongdo I (6350 m).

From this glorious grass-covered camp, suitable for casual football and Frisbee, we could see the unnamed glacier and cirque with the Rongdo peaks (Rongdo I to IV moving clockwise). After several reconnaissance trips to Ngapo Kangri, and up the main glacier to view the cirque of Rongdo peaks, on August 18 Andy, Jeff and Joan, Kunzang, Dawa, Nangang, Arvind and Gombu climbed the west sub-summit (6000 m) of Balden Lhamo (Rongdo III) via the col between Rongdo III and Rongdo IV, then up the southwest ridge (10 hrs return).



Rongdo I and II (Jeff Dolinsky).

On August 22 Jeff and Joan, Kunzang, Dawa, Nangang, and Arvind climbed Chamba (6170 m) or Rongdo II via the southeast glacier (10 hrs return). On August 23 Joie and Nangang climbed the upper west rock ridge of Ngapo Kangri to 60 odd metres below the corniced summit (12 hrs return). At the same time Andy and Arvind ascended Ngapo Kangri via the southerly slopes; first on talus and rock ledges, then (with care) up the avalanche prone southeast aspect to easier angled summit slopes, finally gaining the corniced summit (14 hrs return).

]On August 27 Joie, Kunzang, Dawa and Arvind headed up the main glacier to attempt the true summit of Balden Lhamo (6120 m); a high camp on the glacier was established at 5690 m. An early departure the next morning got us up the icy headwall to the col (6060 m) by 9.00 am, where the steep west ridge curves south to become the long exposed summit ridge. The weather was distasteful to say the least and with minimal technical ice gear and limited technical ice experience in the party, it would have been folly to attempt this long ridge, hence disappointed we retreated.

On August 29 Andy and Nangang left a high camp at 5181 m, several kilometres northeast of our ABC, to climb Gazgazri or peak 6160 m. They ascended the southwest ridge, then traversed onto the icy south face, after which several short pitches the last being 70 degree hard ice, led them to a ledge at the edge of the summit dome, whence they ascended to the highest point (14hrs return to BC).



P. 6160 m.

By August 31 we were all ensconced at BC looking forward to the upcoming evening's Full Moon celebration. Indeed we had a most enjoyable time singing together around a wonderful dung fire – we were a well-harmonised international climbing group! Next day we descended the valley taking two days to arrive back at Rongdo village. Sept 3 we returned to Leh via the Kardung La.

Notes

i. 'Ngapo' (Rongdo I) is Ladakhi for (male) Blue Sheep.

ii. 'Chamba' (Rongdo II) means future Buddha.

iii. 'Balden Lhamo' (Rongdo III) is the name of a female goddess (Rongdo Gompa).

iv. 'Gazgazri' (Peak 6160) is the local Ladakhi spelling for Lammergier (Bearded Vulture). Joie Seagram (Article HJ 69)

Joie Seagram (Article HJ 69)

Email from Andy Selters – expedition member Canadian Expedition 2012

Received 29/06/14

Hello Matthew:

Sorry but Joie was our trip leader and she prepared all of our reports, and I don't think she has anything else written up either. She's in Nepal at the moment and will be going back out of Rongdo (which I found, was the correct word) to climb in August. She won't be going toward the SE Shukpa Kunzang Gl., which I assume is where you're headed. She also did not go up that direction in 2012, but I got more of a look over there when I climbed the peak I've named Gazgazri. On the Swiss map it is labeled 6160 between the Kayok and SE SK Glacier. Unfortunately it was kind of stormy on that climbing day and I didn't get a great view to the N and NW. But I have a pretty good idea that with some easy recon you should not have a problem finding a way to cross over to the SE SK.

I am also going back with a different small group to Rongdo village and trekking up the canyon a ways in August coming, for a scenic acclimatization trek before climbing elsewhere in the region. If you have specific questions I might be able to answer them.

Take care,

Andy S

Email from Jeff Dolinsky-- expedition member Canadian Expedition 2012

Received 01/09/14

Hi Matt,

We didn't prepare a trip report. It was very straightforward as we hired Rimo Expeditions in Leh (and Delhi) as our outfitter and the company was perfect for our needs. In fact I cannot imagine organizing this without them.

Permitting is very hard. Joie had a hell of a time getting her X visa for her trip back there this year. Lots of military checkpoints to show papers to along the way. Very sensitive area. I would recommend taking an inReach sat communicator and only using it if necessary.

As a point to consider, we used a horse team to transport our gear to and from base camp. There are no porters, yaks or horses available in the Shyok valley. No guides either. Our guides were from Darjeeling and Nepal.

The horses and wranglers came over Khardum La to meet us. Pretty tough logistics, IMO.

The best maps we got were the Russian made ones.

The glaciers are very mellow and there is lots of great granite.

Good luck...I have not too much else to add. We found the place very magical...the local families were especially nice. I hope the place never gets spoiled.

Jeff Dolinsky

Rongdu Valley Exploration May – Jun 2013

Go Capt V K Sashindran

A team of 12 mountaineers from the Indian Air Force explored the little known Rongdu valley in May – Jun 2013. This valley has seen only two forays in the past. The team spent 35 days in the valley, explored the main valley and its major side valleys and, climbed 8 virgin peaks in that area.

Rongdu togpo is a small stream originating in the glacial mass of East Karakorams north of the Shyok river in the Nubra region. The Rongdo village (N 34° 24' 56.7" E 077° 47' 07.70") is located at the mouth of the stream and is 35 km from the bridge across the Shyok at Timur and 52 km from Hunder. Tsati, a large village with a primary health care centre, is its nearest neighbour and is located 20 km away to its west and is connected to it by a dirt track.

For the sake of easy description, the Rongdu valley can be divided into 2 parts: the lower and upper Rongdu valleys. The lower Rongdu valley extends from the site where the river debouches into Shyok river up to a little below the location of the Hot Springs. The former also corresponds to the location of the Rongdu village and the latter to the place where Tara togpo from the left and Koyak togpo from the right join a stream Saksyulus coming from up north to form Rongdu togpo. This marks the general upper limit of the summer grazing area of the Rongdu villagers. Upper Rongdu comprises of the Sagtogpa glacier from which 2 streams originate and join to form Saksyulus. There are 8 side valleys on the true left side and 4 on the right. For sake of description, the valleys are referred to by the side on which they are located and numerically starting from the head of the valley. In Upper Rongdo, there are three side valleys L1, L2 and R1. All others are in Lower Rongdu. There are only 3 broad side valleys and they are L1, L2 and R1. Of these, the longest is L2. All the others are just steep gullies cut by glacial streams originating from the mountain ridges that hedge the valley on its east and west.

Immediately beyond Rongdu village, the valley narrows to a defile. The narrowing is due to a large rockfall on the true right side. The trail is about 3 feet wide in Lower Rongdu and this mainly due to regular movement of people, cattle and flocks of sheep moving up and down the valley. 500m beyond the village, the trail starts climbing and snakes up the right side of the valley. It ascends steeply for about 400m and then descends more gently to a small clearing with many trees and brooks running through it called Changma (N34° 25' 30.4" E 077° 50' 15.4", elevation 12574'). From Changma the trail goes up and down screes on the left side of the valley till you reach Thipti (N 34° 25' 37.2" E 077° 50' 33.1") 20 min away. The trail stays to the right of a clump of willow trees with some pasture land all enclosed by a fence of thorny branches. A small adobe hut perched on a huge rock within the enclosure cannot be missed. Doksa (N34° 26' 07.4" E 077° 51' 59.7" altitude 13236') is an hour's walk from Thipti. At Doksa the valley widens considerable. Rongdo togpa runs along the right side of the valley and to its left is a large meadow which has now been brought under plough and serves as arable land for Rongdu villagers. Numerous rivulets coming down from glacial melts high up on the left side of the valley serve as convenient irrigation channels which the villagers keep damming or diverting to irrigate their fields. There are 5 stone and mud dwellings where the villagers reside when they come up to Doksa in mid-May. The fields are then tilled, and wheat sown.

The villagers return to Rongdu and then come up once a month to water the fields. Later, in the season they take their sheep and yaks higher up the valley for summer grazing. The sheep and yak dung is store in stone corrals and used the following year to enrich the fields. Beyond Doksa, boulders brought down by mountain torrents and landslides makes cultivation impossible but small pastures abound. The valley remains wide all the way up to the confluence of the Rongdu togpo with the stream coming down from the second valley on the left (L2). This valley is called Chudon nangma which can be translated as "hot water" valley. This refers to the hot springs located to the east of the confluence of the two streams. Nangma is the Ladakhi word for a big valley. This valley is referred to as Chhurn nangma in the Survey of India maps. The expansive meadows here make good grazing and camping grounds.

On the way up the main valley we did not go to these meadows. Instead, we followed the Saskyulas further up to where a tributary from the first valley on the right (R1) joins it. We crossed this stream and set up our first base camp- BC1 (N 34° 30'02.7" E 077° 57' 13.8", altitude 15719') on a meadow to the left of this tributary. This site is a 45- minute walk from the Hot Springs. A broad peak is visible to the true right of the main valley just as you approach the base camp. The peak looks like a truncated pyramid and this peak was our first objective. A reconnaissance trek up the main valley showed that this peak is part of a massif that extends along the right side of the Upper Rongdu valley all the way up to the head of the valley. The steep face, ice overhangs and cornices that were visible on the western aspect of the mountain made it clear that it could not be climbed from the main valley side (i.e., east face). Moreover the scree and large boulders at its base made going up the valley difficult. Two streams come down from the Sagtoga glacier at the head of the main valley. The right stream begins at the foot of the Ngapo Kangri (Rongdu I) peak and flows below the terminal moraine blocking the entrance to the first side valley on the left (L1). This valley was explored by a Canadian expedition in 2012. This is a broad valley and has many peaks above 6000m hedging it. There is a cirque at the head of the valley now named Canadian cirque. In mid-May, Upper Rongdu was still draped in snow. The snow over the boulders made the going difficult and we had to walk along the streams to reach the head of the valley. After the initial reconnaissance, we turned our attention to R1. We climbed up the ridge on the true left of the R1 and followed the ridgeline. There are many cairns on this ridge erected by shepherds and the valley is thus called Theorchung lungpa (Tiburchang valley in Survey of India maps). "Theor" is the Ladakhi word for cairn and lungpa is the word for a narrow valley. It takes 3 hours to reach the head of the valley and we established our first advance base camp (ABC 1) over here (N34° 31'33.1' E077° 57'01.0", alt. 17406'). Half a kilometre ahead to the northwest was a cirque which separates this valley from a glacier referred to in the Survey of India map as the Lung Tung glacier. There are two cols on this cirque, one to the south west and the other to its north. The latter is a broad one and was named the Vayu Sena col. The cirque was also named the Vayu Sena cirque, (Vayu sena being the Hindi term for Air Force). Just beyond the ABC and to its northeast was a big glacier. This glacier, we discovered, goes along the north-western aspect of the mountain that we wanted to climb. It is possible to go along the glacier and reach the head of the Rongdu valley. A route up the mountain was discovered from its western aspect along a southwest ridge which started just beyond our ABC. An attempt of the peak was made on 18 May 2013. The route up took 6 hours. After the first hour of climbing, we found the snow firm enough to use crampons. The route followed a north-easterly course. After another 3 hours of climbing, the slope became rocky and we had to take off the crampons. The last 50m was like a tongue, a flat but steep slope. The peak had a 2m overhang on the eastern side and

we had to be careful not to step too close to the edge. On the way down, the right border of the tongue gave way and crashed down into the valley below. The ice on the track cracked and sank and we had to hurry across. This peak was named Sa'i Lhamo which is the Tibetan term for the Earth goddess (N34° 31'34.2" E077° 58'03.7" alt. 19785').

A team of 3 experienced mountaineers crossed the head of Tiburchung glacier and set up a summit camp to the north of a peak whose spot height on the map was 6160m (N34° 32'1.39" E077° 57'3.05", alt. 18410'). This peak is located to the northeast of the head of Tiburchung glacier. A cirque located to the southeast of this peak and across the head of the glacier separates Tiburchung glacier from Koyak and Lung Tung glaciers. The cirque continues northwards across the head of the glacier, encircles the peak and then extends in a south-easterly direction separating the head of the Rongdo valley from SE Shukpa Kunchang glacier. The summit camp was a 4-hour walk from the ABC. Peak 6160 was attempted on 21 May 2013. A blizzard and poor visibility almost made the team sit out of the attempt. However they set out at 0530h after the blizzard showed signs of abating. They took the northwest ridge up. The gradient was 45° but the snow firm and good for climbing. After 3 hours they reached a height of 19086' (5990m). They had to then turn back as the weather deteriorated and fixing a rope for further climbing seemed unfeasible. This peak was named Lungkhor Kangri in view of the glacier encircling it (N34°32'40.7' E 077°57'25.9').

Both summit teams returned to base camp and the entire group moved up the main valley. From the base camp the trail climbs steeply northwards for 20 minutes. The terrain then levels off, climbing gently and crossing a well-watered meadow. On our way up this was still covered with 1 foot of snow. After a 2 h walk, keeping to the right side of the Sakskyulas, we had to ascend steeply again for 15 minutes. This brought us to a small meadow directly opposite the mouth of the valley explored by the Canadians. We established our new base camp- BC2 here (N 34°30'32.2" E 077°58'31.4" alt. 16967'). The aim was to explore and climb in the upper reaches of the main valley. A recce team crossed Sakskyulas just below the base camp, skirted the terminal moraine of the Canadian valley and then followed the rivulet coming down from the left side of the main valley. Keeping to the right of this rivulet, they ascended a medial moraine and got a glimpse of the SE Shukpa Kunchang glacier at the head of the valley. There was another glacier coming from the east between Ngapo Kangri and a pyramidal peak to the left of the SE Shukpa Kunchang glacier. This probably is the Sagtogpa glacier arising from the Kunzang group of peaks located to the north east. A branch of the Sagtogpa glacier then swings south into the Rongdo valley. To the right of the SE Shukpa Kunchang glacier was a massif running in an east – west direction. This was separated from the Sa'i Lhamo massif by the Lungkhor glacier coming from R1. The peak on the massif to the right of the SE Shukpa Kunchang glacier was the next target. To reach its base a summit team followed a rivulet coming from the right edge of the valley. After 1 ½ h they ascended steeply up the glacier at the head of the valley, keeping to the right edge of the valley all along. Then they crossed the Lungkhor glacier coming eastwards from R1 and established a summit camp below the peak marked as 6100 on the map (N3426'51.0" E07801'56.0", alt. 18623' [5670m]). The trek up to the summit camp took 5h. Hot sun and the fierce glare from the glaciers made it a tedious climb. The team left for the summit at 0330h on 25 May 13. The sky was overcast but there was no wind. The snow was crisp and firm. The team walked west parallel to the massif. After 45 min, they climbed up a ridge jutting southwards at right angles from the main massif. This brought them to the northern face of the mountain. From here it was a steep climb to the ridgeline of the main massif. The snow was firm and crampons made climbing easy. Once the ridgeline was reached, the snow thinned out and flaky

rocks appeared. The gradient was less steep now but the climb continued in an easterly direction. The promise of a rose pink dawn was thwarted by clouds crowding in and a stinging blizzard. The team reached the summit at 0702h (N 34 ° 32'45.7" E 077 ° 59'17.0" alt 20286'). This peak was named Khyung Kangri as it resembled the mythological Garuda guarding the head of the Rongdu valley with its wings spread out. Khyung is the Tibetan word for Garuda. The massif is actually L – shaped and extends west – east along the glacier coming from R1 and then south – north along the right side of the SE Shukpa Kunchang glacier. The deteriorating weather made the team scurry back to summit camp and then further down to ABC the same day. The second summit team left ABC for the summit camp the same day. They planned to attempt a peak to the north- west of Khyung Kangri. They left summit camp at 0315h but had to stop soon because of strong winds and heavy snow fall. After an hour they were able to resume their climb. They followed the same trail that the first team had taken the previous day. After crossing the ridge extending southwards from the Khyung Kangri massif they descended to a heavily crevassed area and had to rope up. They went in a northerly direction up a gully which went up the summit ridge located to the east. The snow was firm and they climbed using the three-point technique. After 200m ascent, the route became rocky. They climbed a hump and could see the summit another 200m above. A rope was fixed for 50m as the gradient was 60° and the peak was summited at 0617h. This peak was named as Chu Skeyes kangri (Chu Skeyes = lotus [Tib], N34 °33.044' E077 °58'0.507" alt. 19860'). The team returned to summit camp at 0800h and after a quick breakfast, decided to take advantage of the lull in the weather and attempt another peak nearby. The peak they selected was located to the southwest of the summit camp and was on a northeasterly flank of Sa'i Lhamo. The team took half an hour to reach the base of the peak and climbed it from an easterly spur. The team of 6 members reached the summit after 2h of climbing. This peak with its elongated easterly spur resembled the head of an elephant and was therefore named Langpoche (Langpoche= elephant head [Tib], N 34 °32.178' E077 °58'0.507", alt. 19582'). The team then returned to the advanced base camp the same afternoon after a gruelling but extremely satisfying climb.

The next plan was to go up the main valley cross the Sagtogpa glacier, explore southeast Shukpa Kunchang glacier and climb the pyramidal peak between this and the Sagtogpa glaciers. However, the weather played foul. It snowed incessantly for 3 days. On the fourth day when there was a break in the weather we decided to descend to Hot Springs. The fresh snowfall had made climbing risky. We saw avalanches slithering down the peaks in the Canadian valley. Our attention now turned towards the Chudon nangma (Chhurn nangma in Survey of India maps) and the side valley further south (L3).

After savouring the salubrious environs of the Hot Springs camp, a reconnaissance of the valley was done. It is a 3-hour walk on the left side of the valley till the valley closes in with a spur on the left side and rocky scree on the right. Two streams originate from the two sides and soon join up to form the river which we had followed up. The river was frozen at that time, covered by a thick icy layer about 3 feet thick. We could hear the water roaring under it and the ice cracking in places, all intimations of summer which was well underway. A group of 4 tried climbing up the spur on the left. There were two peaks above the spur which looked challenging. On going up the spur, they discovered a cwm there but the ice wall to the southeast and hanging glaciers made it too risky to climb from this side. Later we would discover that the best route up these peaks would be from the east across the glacier feeding the Chhurn togpo. Another team climbed up the rocky scree on the right side of the valley. From the top of the scree, a rock face was visible and a trail could be seen

skirting the slope of the ridge to the right of the valley. A further scouting trip up this side revealed that after a 2 ½ h walk, the valley suddenly widened and a huge glacial lake dammed by the rock face existed. This glacial lake is formed by the glacial melt of the Shan Lung glacier which lies like a crescent above the valley and to its south. Shan= snow leopard [Ladakhi], referring to the fact that we saw pug marks of the snow leopard all the way across the glacier. Straight ahead to the east was a big massif. A branch of the Shan Lung glacier swept northwards along the base of the massif and continued northwards east of the Canadian cirque. North of this massif was another glacier running in an east west direction and joining the Shan Lung glacier at the base of the massif. In the middle of this glacier was a solitary peak (Island peak) which looked interesting. But our first challenge was the big massif dominating the Shan Lung glacier. To climb this massif we established a new ABC3 (N34°31'33.1" E 077°57'01.0" alt. 17406') just ahead of the rock face and on the banks of the glacial lake. From here, the route went eastwards to a small col (N34°27'56.2" E 078°00'20.0", alt. 17523') overlooking the Island peak. This was named Chugnis col, referring to the twelve-member Air Force team). From here, the route veered south eastwards following the medial moraine of the Chugnis glacier to the base of the massif. Then the team skirted the base of the massif in an anticlockwise direction and reached a gully between the two arms of the massif. The massif has three peaks: the highest one on the north-eastern corner, the next one on the western limb, and a third plateau peak on a ridge extending southwards from the main peak. A narrow glacier descends in the gully between these peaks and goes on to feed the Shukpa togpo stream. A summit camp was established on a hillock in the gully (N 34°26'51.0" E 078°01'56.0", alt. 17113'). A team of 4 members and 4 sherpas and Ladakhi nonoos left the summit camp at 0400h. The trail followed a ridge extending from the hillock in a north-easterly direction. The gradient was 45° and it took 1h to reach the head of the gully. We were now at the base of the col on the north between the two main peaks of the massif. We started climbing up the slope which had a gradient of 60° and 50 m below the col veered to the right i.e., in a south easterly direction. It took us two hours to reach the ridgeline from the base. From here it was a 30 min climb to the main summit. The view from this peak was stupendous. There was a big glacial valley with a number of high peaks on the east (Muztagh glacier). To the west, the Shan Lung glacier and the Chhurn nangma were seen in their entirety. Across the Rongdu valley Karpo Kangri could be seen towering in the southwest. To the north the southern rim of the Canadian valley was visible and the Kunzang group of peaks to the northeast. This peak was named Odgsal I (Odgsal = Clear light [Tib], N 34°8" E 078°02'32.1", alt. 20454'). The team descended to the summit camp and thence to the ABC in order to make place for the next summit team. This team followed the same route to the base of the Odgsal col and then rapidly climbed up the eastern face of the peak in the western limb of the massif on the next day. They were able to climb up in 1 ½ h. This peak was named Odgsal II (N34°27'37.6" E 078°01'9.16", alt. 19778'). The third team was scheduled to climb the plateau peak (Odgsal III) but the plan was abandoned. Four days of bright sunshine had made the snow unstable and the route up along the western slope was fraught with avalanche risk. Instead another peak was selected close to the ABC. This peak located in the southern ridge of the Canadian valley was up the first gully ahead of the ABC. The team headed east from ABC up to the col and then veered left to ascend the gully in 45 min time. They then ascended steeply up a glacier to reach a cirque in 2h 15 min. This glacier was named Dabin glacier as it resembled a bowl (Dabin = bowl [Ladakhi]). From there they could see 2 peaks one to the west and another to the east. The team decided to attempt the latter. The slope gradient was 70° and a rope had to be fixed for the last 25m. The peak was climbed by the east-west ridge. And this was achieved in 4h 45min after leaving ABC. The Ladakhi climbers felt that the peak resembled a vulture

head in profile and it was thus named Charok (Charok = vulture in Ladakhi, N34 °29.343', E 077 °59.826', alt. 20087').

While the third summit team was climbing Charok, the first team decided to go up the Rongdo valley up to the glaciers, a task they had left undone due to the bad weather. The team left base camp at Hot Springs at 0600h. They first tried to ascend along the left side of the Sakskyulas but had to abandon the idea as the boulders made going difficult. They forded the stream and climbed on to the flat meadow which they had crossed while going to ABC 2. They then descended to the stream, forded it, skirted the terminal moraine of the glacier coming from L1 and the base of Ngapo Kangri and then turned left. Ascending sharply, they reached a snowfield which was the highest point in the valley at 1100h. From here, 3 glaciers were visible. The SE Shukpa Kunchang to the north, the Lungkhor glacier to the west and Sagtogpa glacier coming from the north of Ngapo Kangri in a westerly direction and then turning south into the Rongdu valley. This point, was named Air Warriors Col (N34 °31'14.2", E 077 °59'28.6", alt. 18249').

The third valley on the left was also explored. L3, Thara lungpa is a short valley dominated by a hanging glacier, Thara kangri glacier. The glacier snout is 30m high and one has to negotiate a snowfield similar to the one at Everest Base camp to reach it. The climbers climbed along the right edge of the glacier snout and reached the glacier after 3 h of climbing. There were 2 peaks above but the sheer rock faces made ascent from Rongdu side impossible. From Odgsal I we had already seen that these peaks could be climbed easily from the eastern side after crossing Shan Lung glacier.

The Air Force expedition spent 5 weeks in Rongdu valley. They climbed 8 peaks, successfully summiting 7, six of which were more than 6000m high (Details in table 1 below). The greatest achievement was that all this was accomplished without anybody falling ill or any mishap.

Table 1. Summary of climbs

Peak	Name suggested	Height	Date of Ascent	Team
1	Sa'i Lhamo	19785' 6030m	18 May 13	Members: Gp Capt VK Sashindran, Sqn Ldr S Dubey, Sgt G S Pokhariya, Cpl JPS Raina, Cpl S Bohra, Cpl JR Poonia Sherpas/Ladakhi nonoos: Skalzang Rigzin, Tshering Bhutia, Karma Sherpa, Tashi Zangla
2	Lung Khor	19086' 5990m	19 May 13*	Members: Sgt C Y Basavaraj, Sgt D K Vyas, Cpl D Chhetry Sherpas/ Ladakhi nonoos: Konchok Thinles, Tsewang Rigzin, Dawa Norbu, Stenzing Desal
3	Khyung Kangri	20286' 6183m	25 May 13	Members: Gp Capt V K Sashindran, Sqn Ldr S Dubey, Cpl JPS Raina, Cpl S Bohra, Cpl JR Poonia Sherpas/ Ladakhi nonoos: S Rigzin, K Thinles, Tashi Gyalson, S Desal, Tsewang Gialston
4	Chu Skeyes Kangri	19860' 6053m	26 May 13	Members: Sqn Ldr Avinash Prasad, Sgt CY Basavaraj, Sgt D K Vyas, Cpl D Chhetry, Cpl IA Dar Sherpas/ Ladakhi nonoos: S Rigzin, T Zangla, T

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				Rigzin, K Sherpa, D Norbu, Cheder Bhutia, Dawa Gyalpo
5	Langpoche	19582' 5968m	26 May 13	Members: Sqn Ldr Avinash Prasad, Flt Lt K S Sanghera, Sgt CY Basavaraj, Sgt D K Vyas, Cpl D Chhetry, Cpl IA Dar Sherpas/ Ladakhi nonoos: T Zangla, T Rigzin, K Sherpa, D Norbu, C Bhutia, D Gyalpo
6	Odgsal I	20454' 6234m		Members: Gp Capt VK Sashindran, Sgt GS Pokhariya, Cpl JPS Raina, Cpl JR Poonia Sherpas/Ladakhi nonoos: K Thinless, D Norbu, D Gyalpo, Tashi Phunchok
7	Odgsal II	19778' 6028m		Members: Sqn Ldr S Dubey, Flt Lt KS Sanghera, Sgt CY Basavaraj, Cpl S Bohra Sherpas/Ladakhi nonoos: S Rigzin, K Thinles, D Gyalpo, S Desal
8	Charok	20087' 6122m		Members: Sqn Ldr A Prasad, Sgt DK Vyas, Cpl D Chhetry, Cpl IA Dar Sherpas/ Ladakhi nonoos: S Rigzin, K Thinless, S Desal, T Bhutia

*Not summited, height mentioned refers to the actual height climbed. The peak's height as per Survey of India map is 6160m.

EXPLORATION (Ryong Kharu)

RYONG KHARU LUNGPA - THE HIDDEN PARADISE

Exploration of Ryong Kharu valley and
climbs in Sagtoga glacier

by Divyesh Muni

A team of six climbers sponsored by The Himalayan Club under the leadership of Divyesh Muni, explored Ryong Kharu valley and Sagtoga glacier in eastern Karakoram. They achieved two first ascents (R 6995m and Sagtoga Lungpa - 6886 m) and also wrote the first account of Sagtoga Col (5915 m) into Kargil valley thus linking Shyok and Nubra valleys.

Sagtoga Lungpa (6886m) and Peak 6215m from summit camp
on Sagtoga Glacier (western)

EXPLORATION (Ryong Kharu)



The much awaited permission to attempt peak Shahi Kangri finally arrived! And we flew to Leh on 17 July 2015 amidst great excitement and anticipation. However, fate had something else in store for us.

As we were flying towards Leh, ominous clouds covered the entire Himalayan belt. While we were landing, the clouds lifted and the sight of a snow-covered land, though very pretty, alarmed me. This was too much snow for July in Ladakh!

My fears were confirmed by the Army officials and our friends in Leh. This year the snow melt had just started and the water bodies were in spate. There was news of bridges being swept away and trekkers and local villagers getting stranded due to washed off routes.

Since our attempt on Shahi Kangri involved our negotiating a narrow nullah for almost 14 km, we reluctantly shelved the idea of attempting Shahi Kangri.

We quickly came up with an alternative plan based on a brief session with Google Earth. The Army officials were most co-operative and we were given the green signal to change plans. On 23 July, with assistance from the Border Roads Organisation, our team of six – Rajesh Gadgil, Vineeta Muni, Sagar Shinde, Nikunj Vora, Kushala Vora



Clockwise from top: The Ryong Kharu Lungpa – climbing towards Camp 1; climbing towards Peak 6195m; Team on the summit of Peak 6195m. Left to Right – Divyesh Muni, Sagar Shinde, Vineeta Muni, Kushala Vora, Rajesh Gadgil.

and Divyesh Muni – arrived at Mundira, on the road from Shyok village to Murgu running along Shyok river in the Eastern Karakoram mountains.

We camped along the road and then set out the next day – three teams in different valleys to check out the possibility of where we could safely head for a month of climbing. Of the three options available, we chose Ryong Kharu Lungpa to explore. The valley was very beautiful, safe

subsidiary of Sagtoga glacier. We decided to attempt Peak 6195m at the head of this subsidiary glacier. We spent a few days at ABC – acclimatising and locating a route to Camp 1 on the glacier.

The weather remained disturbed. Clouds, snowfall and some rain too kept us on tenterhooks. But we were fortunate and did not lose more than a few days.

On 06 August we finally established our Camp 1 at 5765m.

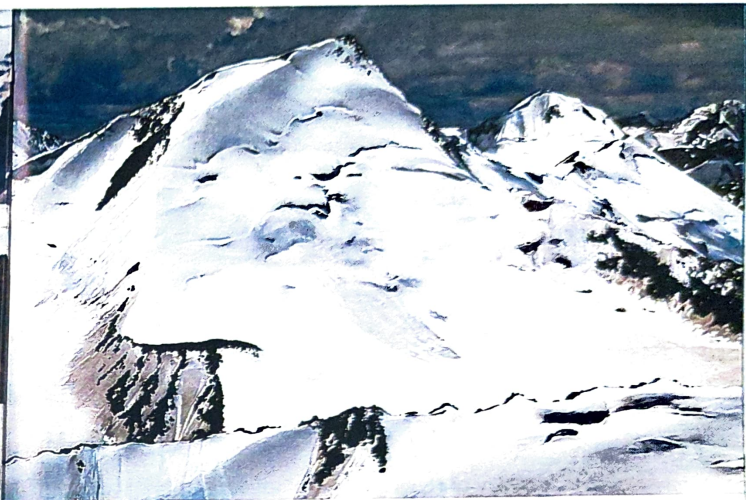


from objective hazards and did not require us to cross any swollen rivers.

It took us three days to establish Base Camp at 4665m. Advance Base Camp (ABC) was located at 5070m on the junction of the various branches of Sagtoga glacier that formed the catchment area for Ryong Kharu valley.

Just above our ABC was the entrance to the first (Eastern)

After a recce of the onward route, our team set off for the summit on 08 August at 6am. The initial route was on the gradually ascending glacier. We then traversed to the other (western) side of the glacier to the base of the south ridge. A steady slow climb of easy gradient followed by a rope length of 60 degree snow and ice brought us on top of the south ridge leading to the summit. An hour of climb along the



Clockwise from top: Sagtoppa Kangri (8305m) seen from the summit of Peak 6195m; 'Paradise Camp' - ABC2 of Ryoung Khuru Lungpa; on the summit ridge of Peak 6195m.

ridge brought us to the summit by 11.00am.

We were very fortunate to get excellent views from the summit. This enabled us to study the peaks and glaciers around and decide on our next objective. The adjoining subsidiary glacier 2 (central) was not of much interest to us, but glacier 3 (western), a little further had a host of interesting peaks.

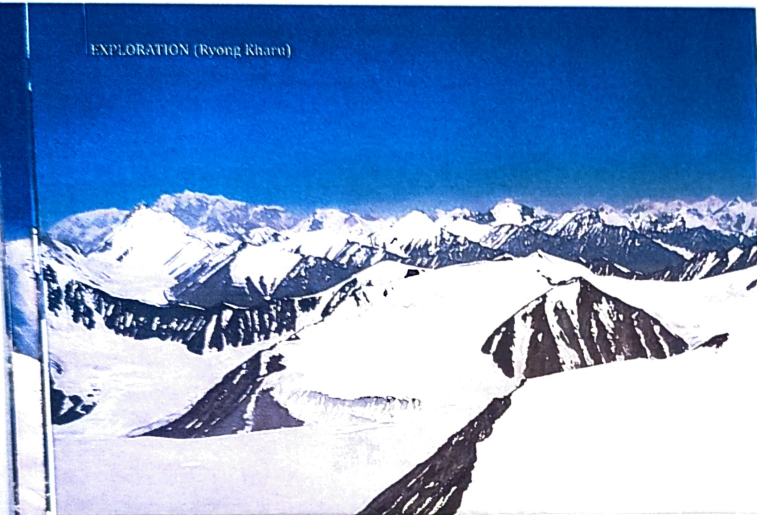
We wound up camp and were at ABC the next day. After some celebrations and much needed rest, we started preparing for our next goal - Peak 6305m at the head of glacier 3, the main branch of Sagtoppa glacier.

The route to the snout of glacier 3 involved a traverse through a lush green ridge that took us gently all the way to ABC 2 (5270m), which we now called "Paradise Camp". The camp was along a stream with beds of flowers all along. Coupled with grand views of the peaks around, the camp was indeed a Paradise.

A few kilometres of moraine and boulders led us to the snout of the glacier. We crossed onto the glacier and climbed gently towards our peak in the north. Since the distance to the base of the peak was long, we had to put an intermediate camp on 15 August at 5500m.

A day of snowfall kept us back, but on 17 August we were

EXPLORATION (Ryong Kharu)



at the base of our peak. We established our summit camp at 5860m on the western slopes of the peak. After another day of bad weather, on 19 August, we started for the summit at 6am, traversing to the northern ridge, only to find that the ridge cumulates into steep rock towers. We skirted the summit pyramid from the western side at its base till we found a snow and ice gully leading to the south ridge. A 70m climb at 50 degrees angle led us to the top of the south ridge. We roped up and climbed the rest of the route to the summit by 11.30am.

The day was exceptionally clear without even a wisp of cloud in the horizon. We were rewarded with views all the way from Stok Kangri in the west to Saser Kangri Massif in the north. Many unnamed and und climbed peaks cluttered the eastern and southern horizons with a few known ones. We were able to identify most of the peaks in view, many of which we had climbed over the last 17 years. We named our peak Sagtoga Kangri since it is the most prominent peak of the Sagtoga glacier.

We now spotted a possible route to cross into the Rongdo valley that could link us with the Nubra valley on our west. The prospect of finding a new route into the Rongdo excited us more than climbing another peak in the area. Rajesh



Clockwise from top: View from the summit of Sagtoga Kangri (6305m) - Saser Kangri group seen in the distance; from "Lake Camp" on Rongdo Valley; peaks of the Rongdo Valley.

Gadgil and I visited the high pass, which we named Sagtoga Col (5915m), leading to the Rongdo, to check the downward route.

The crossing of the pass looked easy but the exit towards Rongdo was not visible. It could be a steep drop or an icefall or a rock face... We could not judge without actually attempting the crossing. We decided to go for it.

Six of us, with three days of rations and minimum gear,

while the six of us continued down the glacier towards the lush green Rongdo valley.

That evening we camped at 5135m, next to some high altitude lakes. It took us another two days to exit at Rongdo village. To our horror we discovered that the devastating cloud burst in Nubra valley had broken the path to Rongdo in several places requiring us to use our climbing skills to negotiate the route. The sting in the tail was the 10 km walk



decided to make an attempt the next day. We were supported by the rest of the team for the initial section of the descent. In case the route proved dangerous or not negotiable, they could have helped us to retrace our steps.

On 20 August, as we walked down the glacier after crossing the pass, we were greeted by a gentle glacier going down towards Rongdo. Our support team returned from that point

to Tsari village since the road between Tsari and Rongdo was also broken at many places.

What started as a disappointment of not attempting Shabi Kangri turned to be a blessing in disguise. The weather did not affect us as badly though it had devastated the rest of region. We had the privilege to explore one of the most beautiful valleys... a paradise indeed.