

EXPLORING 'THAT VALLEY' — TERONG

Climbs in Terong and Rimo Groups

HARISH KAPADIA

'ON SEPTEMBER 17th Oliver and I started up the (*Siachen*) glacier together, taking thirteen coolies with us. We kept to its (*true*) left side over rumpled moraine with numerous wide crevasses to negotiate. After five hours rough going we came to a side valley nullah coming in at right angles. This was a remarkable sight because it was empty of ice: only a tiny milky stream flowed over a level flood plain at least 300 feet below us as we stood on the main glacier.'¹

This was the discovery of the Terong valley by Dr Longstaff in 1909. The Eastern Karakoram and the Siachen glacier itself were remote and were explored over number of years.² This particular side valley between Siachen and Rimo was unheard of and even the locals knew it as Te Rong; plainly 'that valley'.

When in 1929-30 Dutch explorer Dr Ph.C. Visser and his team embarked on their third journey to the Karakoram, they received a note from Dr Longstaff: 'When it is desired to survey this unknown corner, will the party please proceed five miles up the Siachen glacier and take the first turning on their right?'³ And following this cryptic advice Vissers discovered and surveyed the Terong valleys.

Since their visit no other explorers or locals had entered this valley. It remained an unknown corner for 55 years. Planning for an expedition to the Eastern Karakoram this was a natural choice, again to quote Longstaff: '... valley has been known and pointed out for 20 years (*now 55 years*) but Vissers were first to go there. That work was waiting to be done'.⁴ It was still waiting to be completed. If Vissers had lifted the veil, it needed someone to caress it; to visit all the different valleys and record it. We were the lucky ones.

We were six Indians and five Britishers. The intention was to climb various peaks in the Terong group and Rimo I, an attractive

1. *This My Voyage* by Dr Tom Longstaff, p. 189.

2. See article in this issue.

3. *Abode of Snow* by K. Mason, p. 242.

4. *The Geographic Journal* Vol. 84/4, October 1934, p. 293, italics mine.



16. Final slopes of Doab (6045 m).

Article 12 (Harish Kapadia)

virgin. After the initial correspondence, Steve and Dave arrived in Bombay to start our long journey to Siachen. The full team gathered on 6 June 1985 at Leh. We were the first civilian team in the recent history to be permitted into this politically sensitive area.

Siachen is the scene of recent fights between India and Pakistan. In the past many mountaineering teams were encouraged to come from Rawalpindi into this area over the high Bilafond Ia. In 1984, a Japanese team was given permission to attempt Rimo I, deep inside the Eastern Karakoram. They were stopped and now the Indian government decided to encourage mountaineers going from Leh. Mountain explorers were always a part of the 'Great Game'. And now they participate in the new adage: 'Proof of possession lies in climbing.'

We waited for the bureaucracy to sort out its papers. We visited gompas, bathed in the Indus, waited for the LO and the Britishers perfected various techniques of eating mangoes and momoes! But above all we came to know each other well enough for Muslim to survive the ghost stories narrated by Jim. It was an enjoyable irritant which ultimately aided our acclimatization in a large measure. We moved on 12 June for a two-day truck ride. The most amazing sight on these soft, rough roads was the improvisation. To replace a punctured tyre instead of jacking up the truck, they would dig out the soft road from underneath!

The road ended at Pra, right near the Siachen snout. We could manage only ten unreliable Ladakhi porters while the army loaned us ten of the troublesome type for a day. All of us helped to ferry the loads with our three permanent porters from Kumaon who excelled throughout the expedition. We climbed up the Siachen moraine and followed it for four hours. There we stood on the eastern edge (true left), looking to the Terong valley, exactly as Visser had done in 1929. He wrote: 'We intended to explore the unknown region, which extends between this glacier (*Siachen*) and the watershed of the head chain of the Karakoram. We expected to find a side valley, filled up by a glacier, and we were quite surprised when, a few miles from the lower end of the glacier, we found a wide trough opening towards the east, in which a part of the Siachen flowed off. This glacier therefore possessed a second, though short, snout under which the broad stream of the valley disappeared. It was the entrance to a majestic high mountain region with glaciers of up to nearly 16 miles in length.'⁵ Nothing had

5. 'The Karakoram and Turkistan Expedition of 1929-30: A paper read at the Evening Meeting of the Society on 23 February 1931 by Dr Ph. C. Visser'. *The Geographic Journal* Vol. 84/4, October 1934.

changed in so many years as we descended to the true left bank of Terong Topko and camped after 2 km at 'Gyazgo' (3800 m). We were here in 3 days from Leh while Vissers had taken 45 days from Srinagar with 445 coolie loads.

A little ahead in the valley, we crossed the Terong Topko to its right bank and proceeded without much difficulty to the snout of North Terong glacier at 'Tso Camp' (4000 m).

The route ahead again subjected us to the terminal and medial moraine. These Karakoram glaciers had no lateral moraine to give an easy access. We reached the triple junction of the North and South Terong glaciers with the Shelkar Chorten glacier. Our base camp was sited at 'Siab Chushku' (4300 m) on 24 June, 18 km from Pra. The porters were paid off and we were now alone in the valley. Jim and Tony in the meantime had already receded the route to 'Doab Chushku' (5000 m) our ABC. The route followed the North Terong glacier for 8 km to a junction where the glacier divided into an eastern and western section. Tony, in his inimitable style described how the camp is located under a buttress. As a result, next day we saw buttresses everywhere and Steve reached a buttress 4 km further. Earlier, the green jacket worn by Steve had given our Ladakhi porters a scare. Taking him to be a spy they had jumped in a nala. We were in the war zone after all.

The only knowledge our Ladakhi porters had of this unknown valley was in form of a legend. An old man of their village (presumably, a porter with Visser) had narrated the story of Rimo as a shining striped mountain reflecting in the two lakes of the Terong valley. These lakes, according to him, contained poisonous water and no one was allowed to drink it. Now our ABC was between these two lakes with clean drinking water. Of course, after a few days, the western lake became poisonous after our morning visits.

There was no sign of Rimo yet, covered in thick layer of clouds. By 28th we started moving up the North Terong (east) glacier. It rose gently to a valley which led in the east to the foot of Rimo I. A camp was established at 5400 m in this 'Ibex valley'. A spell of bad weather followed forcing us to retreat. However, four British climbers and later Muslim and Arun pioneered the route to the 'Ibex Col' (c. 6200 m) on 2 July. This col, like the two other cols reached during the expedition, linked Terong valleys with South Rimo glacier thus crossing the main axis of the Karakoram range.

We now had enough knowledge of the terrain and acclimatization. Hence we decided to get on with the climbs. It was wise to follow the old Indian proverb: 'If a short man goes with a tall, he will fall sick, if not die'. The British with their vast technical experience were to tackle Rimo I while Indians were to concentrate on other peaks, by no means easy, in different valleys. Thus, nobody

was a pain in the neck and we enjoyed a perfect camaraderie without the usual tensions of an international venture.

'Doab' (6045 m)

This twin peak rose above our Chushku in the centre of the Terong valley. It was the first peak to be taken on and the last to be climbed. Boga and Meena proceeded along the North Terong (west) glacier and camped at 5360 m. Dhiren and Harish joined them next day and they attempted the peak on the 5th. A col to the north of the peak was reached by 7 a.m. going over a number of crevasses. The route ahead rose steeply to a corniced hump. (Photo 16) The overhanging summit lay further ahead on the north ridge. The conditions were not too ideal and hence they retreated 150 ft below and about half a kilometre away from the summit.

But their efforts were not in vain. While others were busy winding up camp for return, Muslim and Harsinh made a three-day push to climb this peak. They established a high camp on SW ridge and reached the summit on 15 July.

'Safina' (5975 m)

An inviting beautiful peak stood opposite our ABC in the east. 'Safina', stood at the entrance to 'Sondhi valley'. Arun and Muslim camped across the glacier on 5 July. Next day they climbed the ever-steepening scree slopes to reach the western snow-ridge. A careful traverse over the cornices landed them on the first summit of the expedition at 1.30 p.m.

By this time, Henry Osmaston, the remaining British member joined as at ABC. He had cut through the proverbial red tape to travel and trek alone. This geographer bivvied alone on the glacier with only biscuits. He joined us on the 6th and busied himself in studying the ice-penitents and the glacier. Perhaps, since Prof Dainelli in 1930, he was the first geographer to conduct studies in Eastern Karakoram.*

Rimo I (7385 m) (Steve Venables narrates):

'Once we had decided on visiting the Terong valley it was inevitable that Rimo, one of the world's dwindling supply of unclimbed 7000 m peaks, should be a major objective of the expedition. However, we knew little about the mountain; one photo of the eastern side had been published in the 1984 *Himalayan Journal* Vol. 41 but, as far as we knew, no photos existed of the western, Terong side. After all the delays of the approach to base camp, I was longing to discover what the mountain was really like, and on 23 June waited impatiently for Jim and Tony to return from their recce to the

* See article in the present issue.

upper glacier. They finally appeared at midday, bubbling with enthusiastic, garbled reports:

"It's wonderful red granite a great plug of granite surrounded by horrible slate terrifying steep buttresses a *Chandelle* like the Freney Pillar must be one of the hardest unclimbed 24,000 ft peaks" and so it went on. (*Photo 14*)

The rest of us went up to have a look the next day but saw only isolated bits of rock and ice disappearing into thick clouds. On the 25th everyone went up to settle at advance base. In the evening the clouds lifted slightly and Rimo briefly, coyly allowed us a quick look at the remote, frightening snow-plastered rocks of the southwest ridge. We also had our first tantalising glimpse of Rimo III, but both summits remained hidden and it was not till two days later that we had our first complete view of these two magnificent peaks.

During the intervening two days of bad weather we began to make plans. They centered on the col to the south of Rimo I, which connects the Terong and South Rimo glaciers. Harish had already named it Ibex Col and hoped to use it to make a circuitous approach to the east side of Rimo III. The British contingent hoped to reach the southwest ridge of Rimo I from the col or the cwm on its western side.

From 28 June to 3 July, as the weather began slowly to improve, there was a lot of traffic up and down the col. They were days of painful load carrying, heavy breathing, probing exploration, wondering and questioning and endless debate, which amongst the British climbers verged at times on the vitriolic. We eventually agreed on a route onto the southwest ridge up snow-slopes on its southern side; we would then follow the crest of ridge from 6400 m to the foot of "the Pinnacles" at 6600 m. "The Pinnacles" were the major obstacle on the ridge and had to be climbed to reach "the Shoulder" at about 6850 m. From there easy angled snow-slopes led to a fore-summit, beyond which a gap led to the final summit snowfield.

After several days camping in the cwm at 5600 m we felt ready, on 3 June, to attempt the route and spent several hours packing loads for the climb. Each pair would take one tent, one stove, food and fuel for six days and two ropes. The rest of the climbing equipment would be shared between the four of us.

We left at 1.30 a.m. on 4 June.

Day 1 (4 June):

It all started well: Crampons biting on crisp, frozen snow, luminous under a full moon. In spite of leaden sacks, we made steady rhythmic progress up the slope. As it steepened to 50° the snow became softer and steps began to collapse. By dawn we were

above 6000 m where there had been little freeze-thaw effect. The snow became increasingly unstable and as the angle steepened again, rock-slabs started to show through. We roped up to spend eight interminable hours climbing five pitches to the crest of the ridge, a whole day of hot struggle with ever softer, wetter snow and shattered rock. Jim, at thirteen stone, could hardly make any progress, Dave and I hardly fared better and it was finally left to Tony to lead us up to the ridge. His lightness and his experience on unpleasant terrain, perfected over many weekends on the mud and chalk cliffs in England's south coast provided the necessary delicacy of touch.

We reached the crest of the ridge in the late afternoon, exhausted and demoralized and with barely enough energy left to excavate two tent plaforms, perched just below the fracture lines of large cornices.

Day 2 (5 June):

It was already clear that we had grossly underestimated the mountain. Originally we had hoped to reach "the Pinnacles" in a day. In fact one day had barely seen us onto the ridge and it would probably require another two days of laborious struggle with soft snow, elaborate cornices and difficult rock towers to reach the distant pinnacles.

I was halfway through the second pitch of the day when Jim shouted across that he had had enough. I went back to the belay to discover that Dave also wanted to descend. I remonstrated:

"But I really want to climb Rimo."

"So do I, but one thing I want more is to live." Dave replied with a touch of melodrama. As far as they were concerned, our route was not only hopelessly long and laborious — it was also plain dangerous. Tony and I agreed that the snow conditions were appalling and that the cornices were dicey, but we thought that with slow climbing and careful placing of rock belays the dangers would be minimised. However, Dave and Jim were adamant and we all returned to the bivouac site and repitched the tents for a day of rest and discussion. It was impossible not to be influenced by Dave's and Jim's dire warnings, and I agonised for several hours before agreeing to continue with Tony. We would take six days food, which could be stretched if necessary, and gas for nine days. Dave and Jim would take enough gear to abseil and down climb the snow-slope and leave the rest with us.

Day 3 (6 June):

Dave and Jim were fixing up their first abseil as I retraced the previous day's tracks along the ridge. Tony broke onto new ground, traversing towards "the Fortress" — a 50 m high tower

which barred the ridge. I continued towards it, scraping and shovelling my way across steep snow-covered slabs and then working up into a chimney which breached the rock walls. Tony's lead to the top of "the Fortress" was a miracle of delicate climbing; unknown to me, he was climbing a steep wall of atrociously loose granite, 30 m above my head. With supreme care, he avoided dislodging all but one small rock, which only gave my shoulder a moment's pain. I led through to a suitable ledge for a tea break and then, in the hot afternoon sun, we climbed two more pitches to a *breche* between two towers. The snow was getting sticky and we were getting tired, so we stopped to bivouac, pleased with our slow but steady progress and pleasantly surprised that we had actually enjoyed ourselves.

Day 4 (7 June):

A short day. We climbed six pitches along the southern flank, avoiding huge cornices on the crest. Rock belays and the occasional ice-screw provided security. At midday we reached the foot of "the Pinnacles". A snow-shoulder, sheltered below a rock wall, provided a perfect campsite, where we spent a relaxing afternoon, drinking brew after brew and drying boots and gloves in the hot sun.

Day 5 (8 June):

The first glow of sunshine lit up the summit of K2, about sixty miles distant, as Tony started the first pitch of the day. While he worked, I had time to watch the Karakoram come to life — K2, the Gasherbrums, Muztagh Tower, Chogolisa and, much closer, on the other side of the Siachen, those bulky giants — K12 and Saltoro Kangri. It was a wonderful start to a long day of hard climbing.

Hours had been spent at base camp staring through binoculars at the system of snowy chimneys and ramps which bypassed the pinnacles on their north side; now it was time to explore them. Once again there was no relenting of the difficulties and it took twelve hours to excavate our way up eight pitches.

In the afternoon, dark clouds which had been massing in the south, swept towards us and snow began to fall, adding a touch of drama as we climbed the memorable seventh and eighth pitches. The seventh began with a tension traverse which dropped me into a vertical snow-choked chimney. The snow offered no purchase and it was a case of scraping desperately with axes and crampons to find nicks in the rock underneath. The eighth pitch was worse — a prolonged, exhausting nightmare of loose snow on loose rock and, following on a tight rope, I never quite worked out how Tony had managed to climb it.

We were supposed to reach the top of "the Pinnacles" that day, but the last 50 m looked very hard, it was late, it was snowing and I had had enough, so we stopped to pitch the tent dramatically on a huge cornice, 10 m below the belay.

Day 6 (9 June):

The tent was battered by strong winds all night. We assumed that the weather was foul outside and it was only at 7 a.m. that we looked out to see a cloudless pale blue sky. After the usual slow breakfast and packing, we were away at 10.30. Three hours later we reached the top of "the Pinnacles". We had passed the crux of the route and, now that we were clear of the rocks, the snow began to improve so that it was actually possible to kick steps and make steady progress round cornices towards the big snow-ramps leading up to "the Shoulder". (*Photo 17*)

Late that afternoon, approaching the top of the ramps, I felt utter contentment. At about 6850 m, it was hard work and I was having to take four deep breaths to every step but the snow at last had a uniform consistency and it was possible to establish a rhythm. It was a beautiful evening and as we gained height the arctic wastes of the upper Rimo glacier came in sight for the first time. If the weather held and if the gap beyond the fore-summit held not insurmountable problems, we might be on the summit in two days.

It was time to stop for the night, so I stopped on the crest of a snow-arête to dig a platform. First I wanted to get the heavy rucksack off my back so I rammed my ice-axe into the snow then took off the rucksack and clipped it into the wristloop of the axe. Before removing the axe-sling from my shoulder, I pulled in some rope to tie off the axe, just in case it should come out. A moment later I turned round to see the rucksack sliding down the slope, unattached; apparently I hadn't clipped it into the wristloop.

I stared with incredulous horror at the sack gathering speed, sliding then somersaulting and bouncing and bursting open as it disappeared over the edge to plummet 1000 m into the western cwm. Sleeping bag, duvet, food, tent poles and, most vital of all, the gas stove had gone. One tired, careless move had ruined everything and the only choice was to retreat.

Tony was a paragon of restraint. He didn't utter a murmur of complaint and his only concern was that I should snap out of my hysterical anger and misery and concentrate on the job of getting down alive. We reversed three pitches, dug a platform and suspended the poleless tent as best we could from the belay. The temperature dropped to -30°C and the vicious north wind slapped the loose fabric all night. Inside, sharing Tony's bivouac clothes, we shivered miserably and longed for hot brews of tea.

Day 7 (10 June):

The morning was bitterly cold. It was also brilliantly clear and the perfect weather seemed a horrible mockery of my incompetence. Our only consolation was that the descent went like clockwork. In seven hours we descended 1200 m to the camp in the cwm. Eight long abseils took us straight down onto the big icefield below "the Pinnacles". There we were delighted to find good névé, which we could downclimb quickly. At the start of the abseils we had been struggling with numb toes and fingers; seven hours later, the cwm was a merciless heat trap. We stopped at the camp for our first drink in 28 hours. The enervating heat and the accumulated tiredness of six days hard work above 6000 m suddenly took effect and three hours passed before we could persuade our lethargic bodies to repack the one rucksack and continue the descent to advance base.

On the descent I was already thinking about a second attempt. Discovering firm frozen snow on the icefield, we realized that this was the route to take, we could reach the foot of "the Pinnacles" in a day, avoiding all the lower parts of the ridge.

But first we had to rest. The fine weather continued, as we climbed into the western cwm to retrieve my rucksack and then spent two days down at the river fixing ropes across cliffs for Boga's and Arun's return to Siachen.

We returned to advance base hoping that we might be given a second chance. But already the first ominous high cirrus clouds had appeared. The storm, which had been wreaking havoc in the Himalaya for several days, finally reached the Karakoram.

We never got our second chance. Rimo I remains unclimbed and we just have the memory of six days on the ridge, and 33 pitches of the most demanding climbing either of us have done.'

'Lharimo' (6070 m)

Activities continued lower down on the glacier too. On 7 July members and porters ferried loads to base of Ibex Col for Boga and Meena to cross next day. They descended the steeper and softer eastern slopes and camped 2 km away. On 10th, they climbed to a col between their peak and point c. 6120 m at the western head of South Rimo glacier. On 11th they reached two high points of c. 6120 each in different directions. Starting early the same night they climbed in starlight to reach the summit of Lharimo in the early hours of 12 July. In the northwest Rimo group looked magnificent. (Photo 12) They recrossed the Ibex Col and were back on the 13th.



17. Climbing SW spur of Rimo I.

Article 12 (S. Venables)

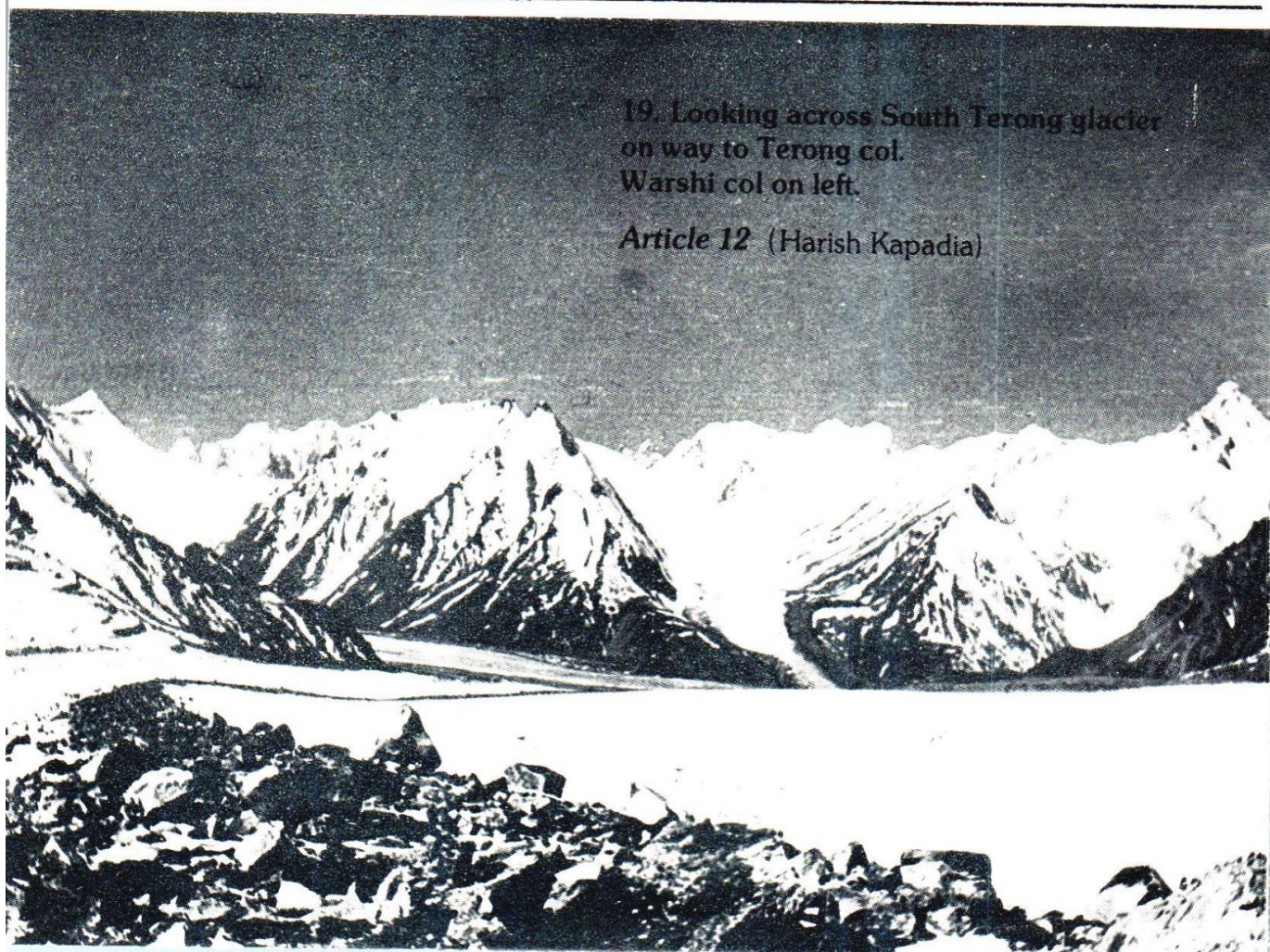
18. On way to Terong col (left)
from South Terong glacier.

Article 12 (Harish Kapadia)



19. Looking across South Terong glacier
on way to Terong col.
Warshi col on left.

Article 12 (Harish Kapadia)



'Saigat' (6130 m) and Teram Shehr Ice-plateau

Of an average height of 6500 m was a huge ice-plateau to our north. It drained into the Teram Shehr glacier. A peak at its edge ('Mt Laxmi') was climbed by Workmans in 1912. It was a fascinating sight whenever we climbed higher. Five of us camped at the head of North Terong (east) glacier intending to find a route upto the ice-plateau, which would link with Col Italia. On 9 July, Jim and Muslim camped high up on the slopes of Pt 6840 m. They undertook a long traverse but were stopped by a dangerous slope. On the return they could recce a not-too-safe gully leading to the ice-plateau.

In the meantime Harish teamed up with Pratapsinh to attempt 'Saigat' on 10 July. This small but beautiful peak looked up to the Rimo group. Entering the western cwm of Rimo they turned onto a ramp towards the peak. An exposed traverse led to the upper snow-plateau. It would have demanded more time and equipment than they had at their disposal. While on the higher camp here, Jim observed the upper reaches of Rimo I and felt tempted to attempt it from the east. With his appetite whetted, he tempted Dave to join him and left for the higher pastures.

'Sondhi' (6480 m) and 'Sundbrar' (6300 m)

Opposite ABC, due east, was a wide open valley. A highly broken icefall defended the entrance. It continued gently later on to a col. This was the 'Sondhi' valley. Dhiren and Harish had probed the icefall in the initial stages of the expedition and found it steady. Encouraged by the recce, Arun and Dhiren started on 11 July for the upper reaches of the valley. Dhiren led energetically over the fragile snowbridges. They camped at 5600 m by noon. At 2.30 a.m. on the 12th they started and turned north to reach a col over-looking the Ibex valley. Following the west ridge 'Sundbrar', on the 'Ibex-Sondhi' valley divide, was climbed at 9.30 a.m. The view of the south face and SW ridge of Rimo I was stupendous.

On the 13th they started early again and turned east, a little before the col, to traverse to Sondhi peak negotiating steep snow-slopes they summited at 11.30 a.m. overlooking the Sondhi col. They stood on the main axis of the Karakoram.

On the west stood the high sentinels like K12, Saltoro Kangri and Ghent. On the east were the sober brown slopes of Central Asia. They retraced their steps through the icefall to return to ABC after their plucky venture.

With this we had come to an end of the climbing activities in the north. A problem was on our hand. Terong Topko was in spate and had cut off our retreat. An attempt by our LO to tame the

Terong ended in a near disaster. Tony and Steve descended and fixed an alternate route with ropes but that was to be the grand finale.

We retraced with loads to BC. Soon we had with us Dave and Jim, and the celebrations for the first ascent of Rimo III.

Rimo III (7233 m) — first ascent: (Dave Wilkinson narrates):

'Jim had been as sure as me about going down. The soft unconsolidated snow on Rimo I had been exhausting and dangerous. At least we had been able to improve Tony and Steve's chances by bequeathing our food to them.

We had invested much time and money in this trip, so our decision had not been taken lightly. Mountaineering decisions are often fine balancing acts, trying to decide where courage ends and folly begins, where is the line between caution and cowardice. At times of contemplated retreat, my mind is often plagued with doubts, great secret battles are fought. The careful self, full of commonsense, wants to survive, and gives a reasoned justification for not pressing on. Opposing is the bold self who craves success, thrives on excitement, and dismisses the other's arguments as excuses for fear and the sloth of advancing years. Such inner conflicts are often fiercely contested. But not on this occasion.

The consequences of the poor snow were reason enough for retreat, I had other good reasons too. My usual nagging high altitude cough was worse than I had ever known, I was producing infected sputum. A finger had suffered in a minor stumble into a stream on the glacier one night the previous week. This was still causing considerable pain, and protracted hard climbing was a daunting prospect. A subsequent X-ray in England revealed a badly comminuted (splintered) fracture. This was not known at the time, but it didn't feel good.

Back at camp, I spent a frustrating few days in good weather, the throat responding to antibiotics, the finger showing slower progress. Jim had a bare week before he had to go home to work. My bold inner self was starting to nag again. The weather was near perfect. We both felt the need for action.

From our base on the North Terong glacier, the two main mountains of the Rimo group looked equally impressive. Rimo I irregular but steep all round, and Rimo III more symmetric but also devoid of any easy line. (Photo 15) My finger and Jim's time shortage seemed to rule out any major action here. We could opt for a smaller easier mountain, but during my days of inactivity, I had formed a more speculative notion. We had a picture taken the previous year by the Indian Army from the South Rimo glacier, on the other side of the range. This showed the east face of Rimo I and its subsidiary peak, Rimo II. It appeared to be a

little easier than our rear side. However, the photo was not a close-up, and we were not sure. Did we have time for a try? I made my proposal to Jim, and he jumped at it with the alacrity of a man who had similar ideas already. We would leave early next morning with a week's food and gas, and what little climbing equipment we could carry.

We had to cross the Ibex Col at over 20,000 ft, descend the far side and then do our climb which we hadn't even seen yet. We had time for only a single quick dash. I also had a "B" plan in my mind, which I didn't disclose yet. Harish's army map showed an easy ridge on the far side of Rimo III, not that we could be sure of the map's accuracy, but . . .

That evening, Steve and Tony came back from Rimo I, and told about the dropped sack and all. During my enforced illness, I had scoured the mountain with binoculars, vainly trying to follow their progress and come to terms with my worried feelings towards them. What a fine effort, hope they succeed. Envy — why am I not up there? Hope the mad fools fail. Now this admiration and jealousy were overtaken by relief to see them safe and well.

Curiously, their sudden return did not alter our plans at all. They could do no more without a good rest, and Steve was short of a few items, so there was no question of their joining us.

After the euphoric planning, the horrible reality returned with the night-time stumble up the glacier shouldering a monster load. Curse that Fotheringham, why is he so fit, as I struggled to stay within earshot. "Sorry Jim, have to have 5 minutes." First light saw us at the site of the camp below the Rimo I attempt. The weather remained clear, but a bitter cold wind brought out gloves and duvet jackets to comfort numb fingers and ears. A gruelling ascent to the Ibex Col opened up a romantic vista to the east, like a traveller's tale from Tolkien.

The most white expanse of the South Rimo glacier stretched out before us. Beyond, as the big mountains ended, the hazy brown of the Depsang plains, with the shining silver ribbon of the Chip Chap river where goes the old trade route to the Karakoram Pass, and over into the Sinkiang province of China.

The descent down our branch of the South Rimo glacier was easy, but as fatigue took hold, my legs felt like mechanical appendages, carrying me on, but not totally in my control. We rounded the corner at the glacier junction, and immediately found a delightful camp-site on a crystal gravel bank of moraine beneath Rimo I's east face.

As we brewed and ate the day to its close, we had ample time to look at our objective, but didn't need long. A glacier face gave a zig-zag line between seracs to a prominent terrace at two thirds'

height. From here a choice of Andean finishes was available to the top of Rimo I: A steep fluted face, or narrow corniced ridges on either side. The adequacy of our food and time or my digital ability were of no consequence — one rope and a handful of ironware were clearly inadequate equipment.

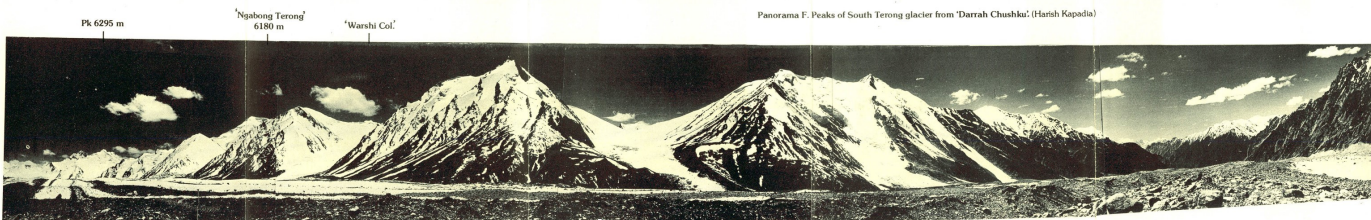
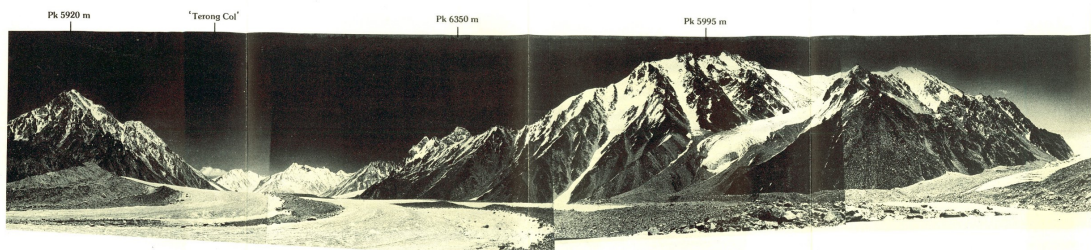
The slightest glance towards Rimo III showed a gentle snowy northeast shoulder. Whether Jim had also previously had this at the back of his mind, I do not know. In any case, he agreed to this change of plan with remarkable speed and flexibility.

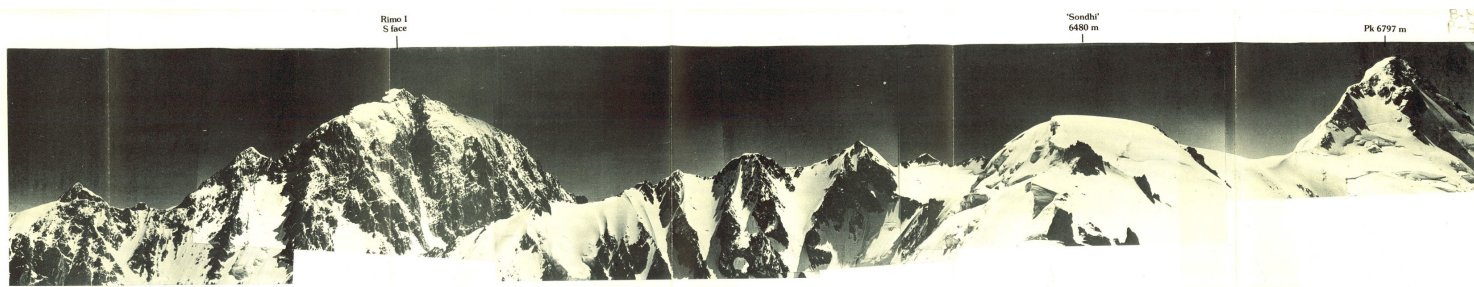
Sacks were lightened by dumping some food for the return journey, and also leaving some of our already sparse hardware. This lightness seemed less evident next morning, as we crawled up the glacier branch between Rimo II and Rimo IV. The threats of serac fall from either side of this narrow way produced no startling turns of speed from us; but the threats were of some use, as they encouraged us not to stop for our next camp until the glacier widened a little, and our way went off right up another glacier branch between Rimo III and Rimo IV.

Next morning, we had our first view of the col between Rimo IV and our ridge on Rimo III. We had a route decision to make. The easy line to the col itself was abandoned, as some rock pinnacles appeared to complicate the first part of the ridge. We chose instead a bigger and steeper snow-slope further left, which led to our ridge above all obvious difficulties. When we tried to climb this slope, it proved to consist of chest deep snow with the texture of confetti, so it was also abandoned for mixed ground just on its right. This gave 800 ft of alpine DETD. The rock sections were very pleasant, but the snow had not consolidated much since our Rimo I attempt. Contrary to normal, the worst snow was found on the steeper ground, presumably because it was less exposed to the wind, or because it lay awkwardly on top of the rocks.

Above this section, we cut a vast camping platform into the easy ridge, and I made a vague effort to emulate Steve by dropping my Karrimat. This camp must have been at or over 22,000 ft, so only 1500 to 2000 ft of easy ridge remained. We felt confident of success the next day.

We set off early with light sacks, but still managed no great note of ascent. Altitude was making itself felt more and more, several panting breaths being required between each uphill step. Even so, steady progress was made, and it seemed that only the weather could stop us now, for dark clouds were gathering. However, these seemed to be of the 'slow to anger' variety, the main threat was to our summit views. A narrow corniced section of the ridge was mercifully short, some rock towers were easily passed, and only a Mont Blanc type snow-shoulder remained. At over 23,000 ft, the body was pressed to find enough oxygen in what remained of the planet's





Rimo I
S face

'Sondhi'
6480 m

Pk 6797 m

B.M. 42-
P-2430

Panorama G. View from summit of 'Sundbar' (6300 m), (Dhiren Toolidas)

K12

Saltoro
Kangri

Ghent

Pk 6600 m

Teram Shehr
ice-plateau

Pk 6475 m



shallow atmosphere. It was a case of step up, six deep breaths next step. . . . The technical anticlimax of this ridge was countered by the fight for air, and the exhilaration of ever widening views coming and going between the gathering clouds. (Photo 13)

At last we stood on the corniced top; but had to wait several minutes for the view to clear momentarily, first one way, then the other, to be sure we were actually there. One such clearing gave a dramatic glimpse of Rimo I and II close at hand, with a great banner cloud streaming in the wind.

Then I remembered something. In Bombay, Harish's son Nawang had given me a small flower in a tiny envelope asking me to place it 'on top of a mountain', some sort of a Hindu tradition. I could not ignore such a simple and charming request, so I placed it carefully in the highest snow, without knowing its exact significance. Later, we learnt from the Indians that its purpose was to bring us good luck.

Reaching the top of a mountain is not, in the event, the great thrill which the layman might imagine. The main feelings are exhilaration, relief that its over, and worry about the descent. As he sat on our highest ever summit, Jim summed up this anticlimax with a casual but telling remark, "Shall we go now? There's nothing for us here".

Shortage of pitons caused problems on the descent of the steep section, but adequate anchors for abseil appeared when most needed. We even descended off a rucksack accessory-strap, and an ice-screw driven into a rock crack. The weather deteriorated slowly. As we reached the Ibex Col, snow fell gently. We returned to camp 2½ days after leaving our summit, and it snowed heavily that night. We had been on the go, glacier travel, reconnaissance, and climbing an unexplored mountain, for 6 days, well served by Nawang's little talisman.'

Exploring South Terong

With this Tony, Jim, Arun and Boga left for home. Meena stayed at BC after an unsuccessful attempt to cross 'the Ropes'. Visser had visited the North Terong and Shelkar Chorten glaciers and surveyed the former. No party had ever entered the South Terong glacier. Hence, for the last few days we decided to be the first humans there — a rare feeling.

Dhiren, Harish, Dave and Muslim proceeded to the South Terong snout (5 km) on 20 July. Keeping to the true right they aimed for a non-existent lateral moraine shown on the map. The scree was hideous and going utterly bad. Camping in a small clearing at 4800 m they proceeded to the centre of the glacier on 21st. A long ice-tongue gave a smooth access to 'Darrah Chushku' (5000 m).

A magnificent sight, a junction in the middle of nowhere covering the entire vista of the glacier.

Dhiren and Harish turned to the broad eastern branch. In 6 km they climbed 500 m without a single crevasse to camp at 5500 m. A valley in the north led to Shelkar Chorten glacier. On 23rd they reached 'Terong Col' (5720 m), 4 km away. (Photos 18-19) On the east another gentle valley descended to South Rimo glacier. Thus over a very easy terrain, it connects Siachen-Terong valley to Rimo-Shyok valley. At the same time Muslim and Dave crossed over from the Darrah camp to the left bank. Muslim and Harsinh climbed up a small valley and stood on the broad 'Warshi Col' (5440 m). It descended to North Warshi glacier and down to Warshi village in Nubra. Thus a route can be traced connecting Warshi (in Nubra) to Daulat Beg Oldi in Shyok. This would take four days over Warshi and Terong cols instead of a circuitous route over Saser la (5330 m). Next day, Muslim investigated the southernmost sections of the glacier.

With our explorations completed, we gathered at BC, but where was Steve?

Shelkar Chorten Glacier, 'Chorten' Peak (6050 m) and 'Ngabong Terong' (6180 m)

'Wyss and Khan Sahib climbed the Te Rong Glacier to map out its neighbourhood, Franz Lachmatter and I penetrated over the huge Shelkar Chorten Glacier into the high mountain range.

In contrast with the glacier branch which Wyss and his party were exploring and which was lying in a deep valley, ending in steep rock walls, our glacier found its origin in a big firn field, surrounded by high snow mountains.'⁶

So wrote Visser while exploring this glacier. Now on 21 July Steve was camping on this firn field — alone. Coming over the broken icefall took two days and he reached 'Shelkar Col' (5800 m) at the head, which led to the Darrah camp. He climbed 'Chorten' peak to the north of the col. He had good views of two more cols including the Terong Col reached by Dhiren and Harish. He descended to the South Terong valley on 22nd and turned SW, one valley after the valley leading to Warshi Col. His aim was to climb an inviting twin summit peak with a snow-arête.

(Steve Venables narrates):

"'Ngabong Terong' was neither a long nor a particularly hard climb but, because snow conditions become lethal by mid-morning, it had to be staged over two days. The first day I climbed up the side glacier and a 50° snow-ice (slope) to a huge bergschrund at

6. Visser, *ibid*, p. 283.

5800 m. By 8.30 a.m. I had pitched the tent inside the bergschrund and settled down for a long, lonely wait.

At dawn the next day I was on my way up the snow-arête. I stopped three metres below the east summit — a large, unstable cornice. Looking across to the west summit, I had to admit reluctantly that it seemed slightly higher. A horrible 300 m traverse on sugary ice, round the south side of the cornice, led to the easy connecting ridge and by 7.30 a.m. I stood on the camel's second hump (*Photo 21*) which was indeed slightly higher (6180 m).

For a few minutes I savoured my last chance to look out over the hundreds of unclimbed peaks of the East Karakoram, which already were smothered under the spreading cloud of another storm. Then I hurried back round to the eastern hump and descended the arête, already sludgy in the first heat of the day, and at 10 a.m. crawled back into my cave to spend an interminable day dreaming of human company and brown bread and Stillon cheese.

The longing for company and the vivid fantasies about food grew more intense on the sixth day, during a purgatorial descent to base camp. After twelve hours of slithering and stumbling on boulders, under a grey drizzling sky, I arrived at a bleak, deserted camp. The others had left a note and a huge kit bag to add to my already considerable load. I finally rejoined them the following day at the Terong river.'

Return

With this our time in the Terong valley was over but not the adventure. Due to the flooding of the Terong Topko no porters were expected and we carried loads to 'the Ropes'. Ahead was a scary and exposed traverse on the rock wall above the river. (*Photo 20*) It was hard work and crossing the numerous ice-streams with floating ice-blocks was painful. Finally the loads were ferried across a provisional ladder put up by our LO from the other side. As a climax we had a porter strike and a monumental sulk from our LO. 'Its his problem' — Dave dismissed it in his usual style. By 27 July evening we were at Pra and on our way home.

Concluding the lecture by Visser at The Royal Geographic Society it was said:

'We have listened to a lecture full of the liveliness which distinguishes Dr Visser: a most delightful lecture, in very correct English, in which I dare say, he has even corrected a current English expression in so far as he has proved that to give someone a "Dutch treat" can sometimes also have a pleasant meaning.'

7. Visser, *ibid*, p. 294.

Five and a half decades later, the Indo-British experience was equally a *treat*, completing the thorough exploration of 'that valley'.
Summary:

Peaks climbed: (all first ascents)

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. Rimo III
(7233 m — 23,730 ft) | Wilkinson and
Fotheringham | 14 July
NE ridge
From east via
South Rimo
glacier. |
| 2. 'Sondhi'
(6480 m — 21,260 ft) | Samant and
Dhiren | 13 July
west ridge
via western
icefall. |
| 3. 'Sundbrar'
(6300 m — 20,670 ft) | Samant and
Dhiren | 12 July
west ridge
via western
icefall. |
| 4. 'Lharimo'
(6070 m — 19,910 ft) | Boga and
Agarwal | 12 July
south ridge. |
| 5. 'Doab'
(6045 m — 19,830 ft) | Contractor and
Harsinh | 15 July
south ridge |
| 6. 'Safina'
(5975 m — 19,600 ft) | Samant and
Contractor | 6 July
west ridge |
| 7. 'Chorten'
(6050 m — 19,850 ft) | Venables
Solo | 22 July
west ridge |
| 8. 'Ngabong Terong'
(6180 m — 20,280 ft) | Venables
Solo | 24 July
east ridge |

The following peaks were attempted:

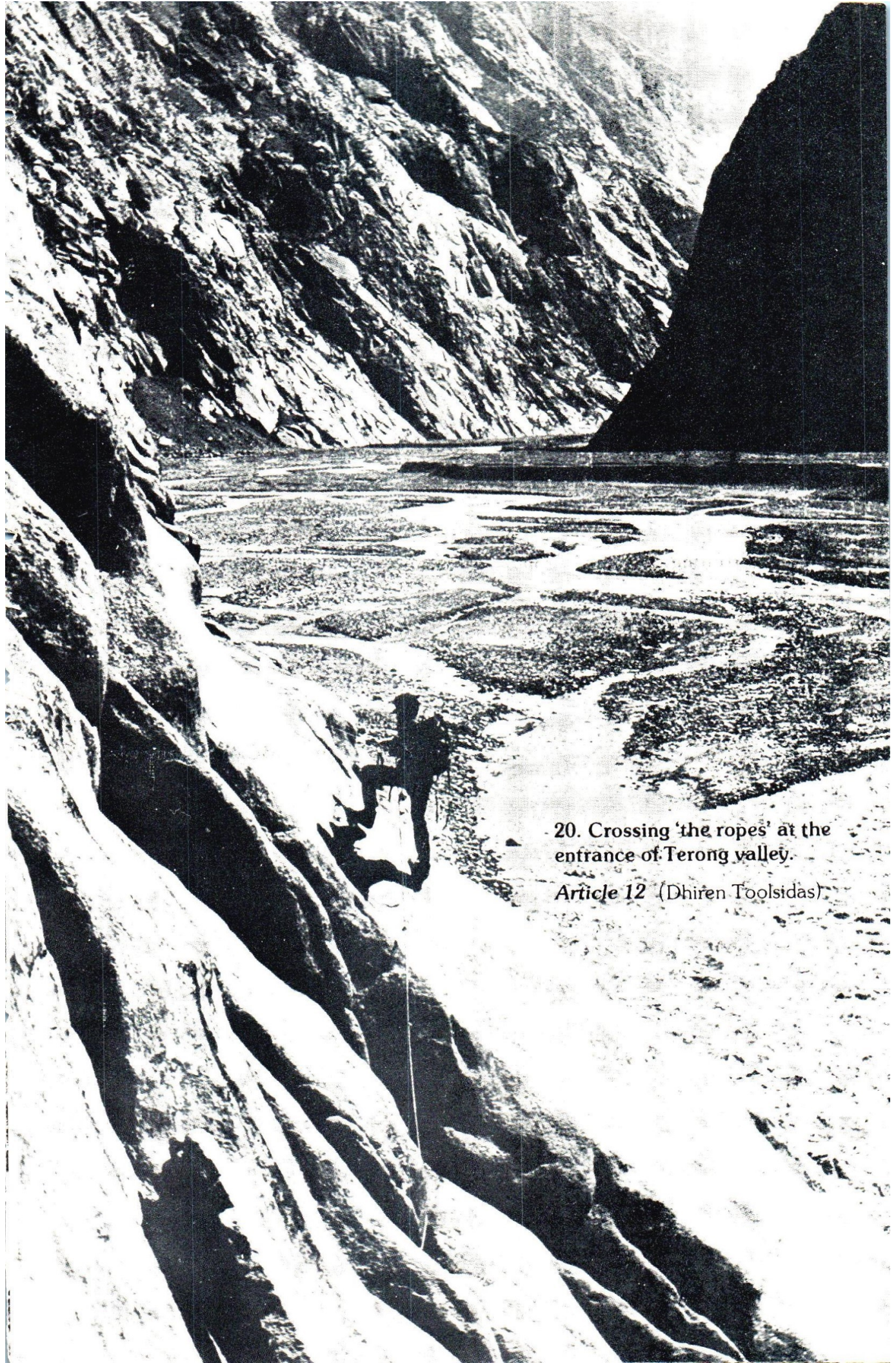
- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (a) Rimo I
(7385 m — 24,230 ft) | Saunders and
Venables | reached
6900 m via
SW ridge. |
| (b) 'Saigat'
(6130 m — 20,110 ft) | Kapadia and
Pratapsinh | reached
5800 m on
south face. |

The expedition explored five different cols.

Sponsored by: The Indian Mountaineering Foundation and The Alpine Club.

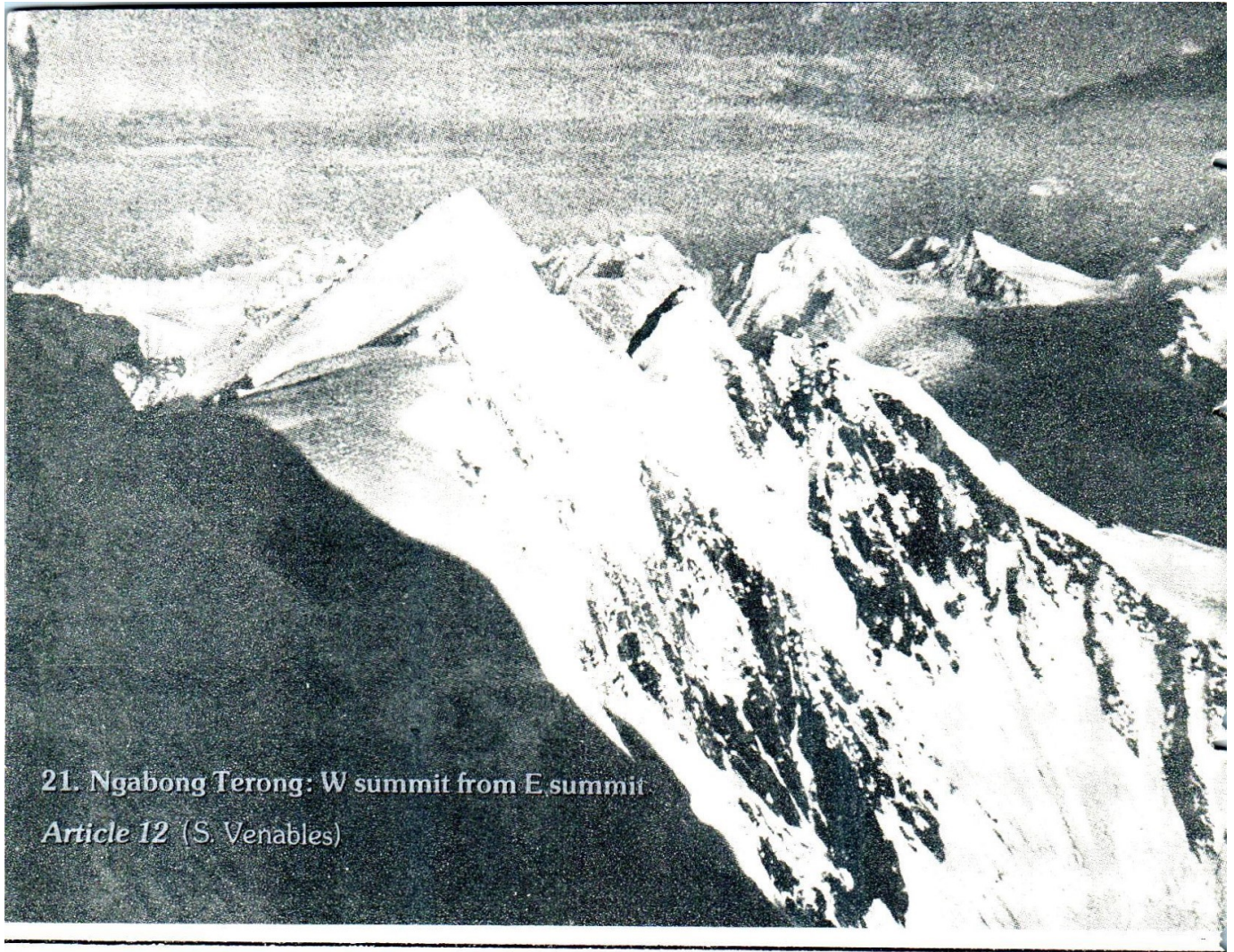
Members: Harish Kapadia (leader), Arun Samant, M. H. Contractor, Dhiren Toolsidas, Z. S. Boga and Dr (Ms) M. Agarwal (Indian). Dave Wilkinson, Jim Fotheringham, Tony Saunders, Stephen Venables and Henry Osmaston (British), 2nd Lt Mahendra (Army liaison officer).

Period: 31 May to 4 August 1985.

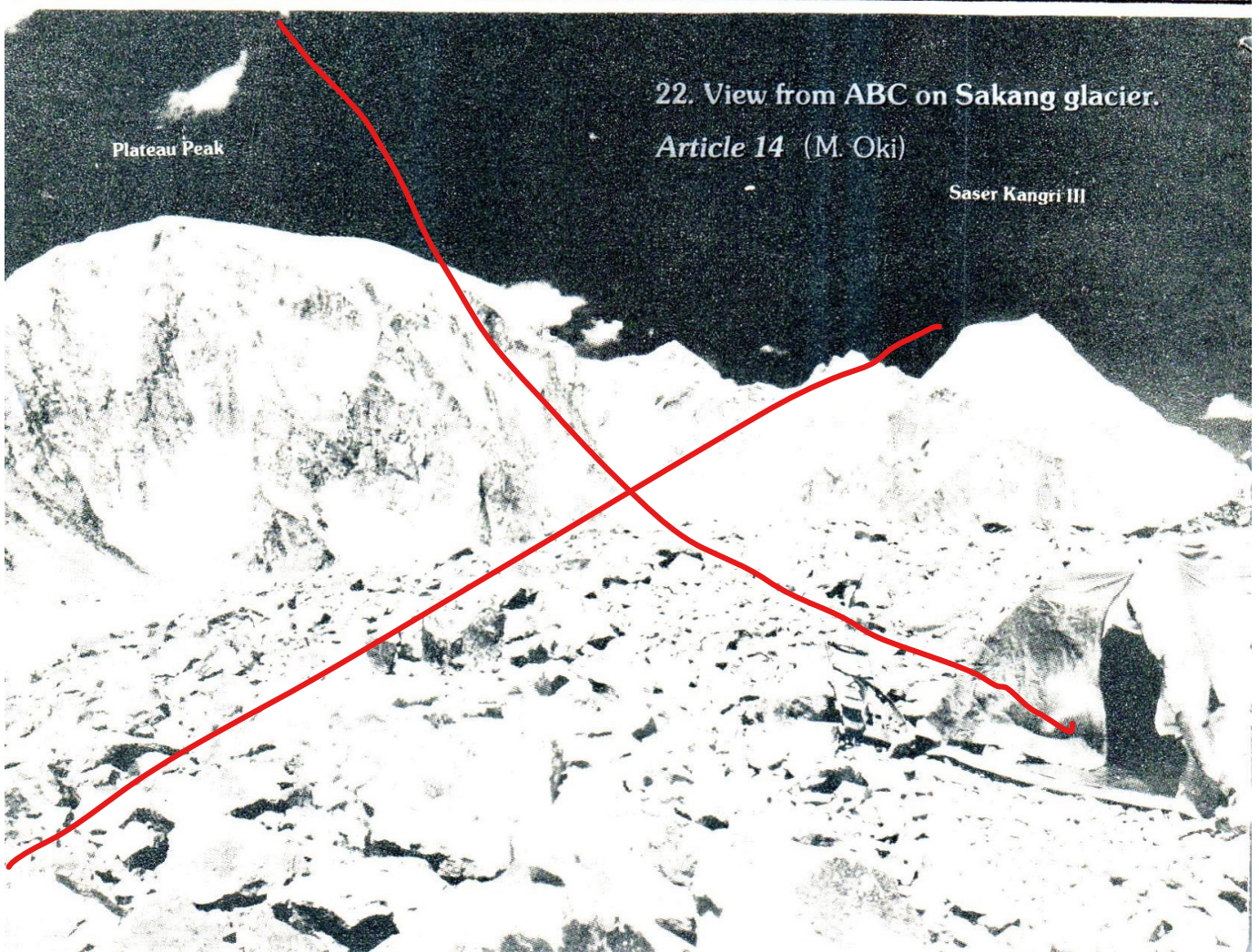


20. Crossing 'the ropes' at the entrance of Terong valley.

Article 12 (Dhiren Toolsidas)



21. Ngabong Terong: W summit from E summit
Article 12 (S. Venables)



22. View from ABC on Sakang glacier.
Article 14 (M. Oki)

Plateau Peak

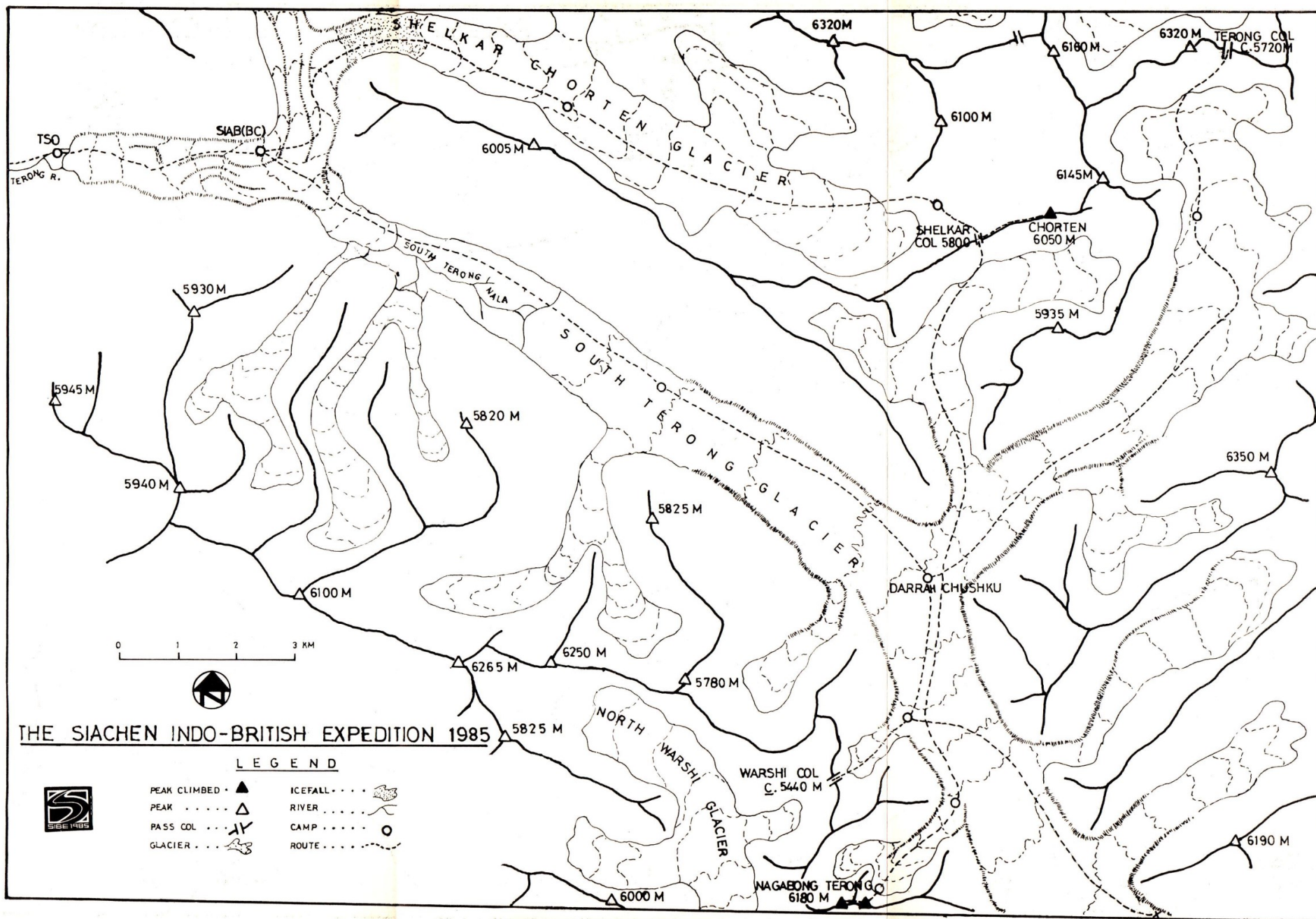
Saser Kangri III

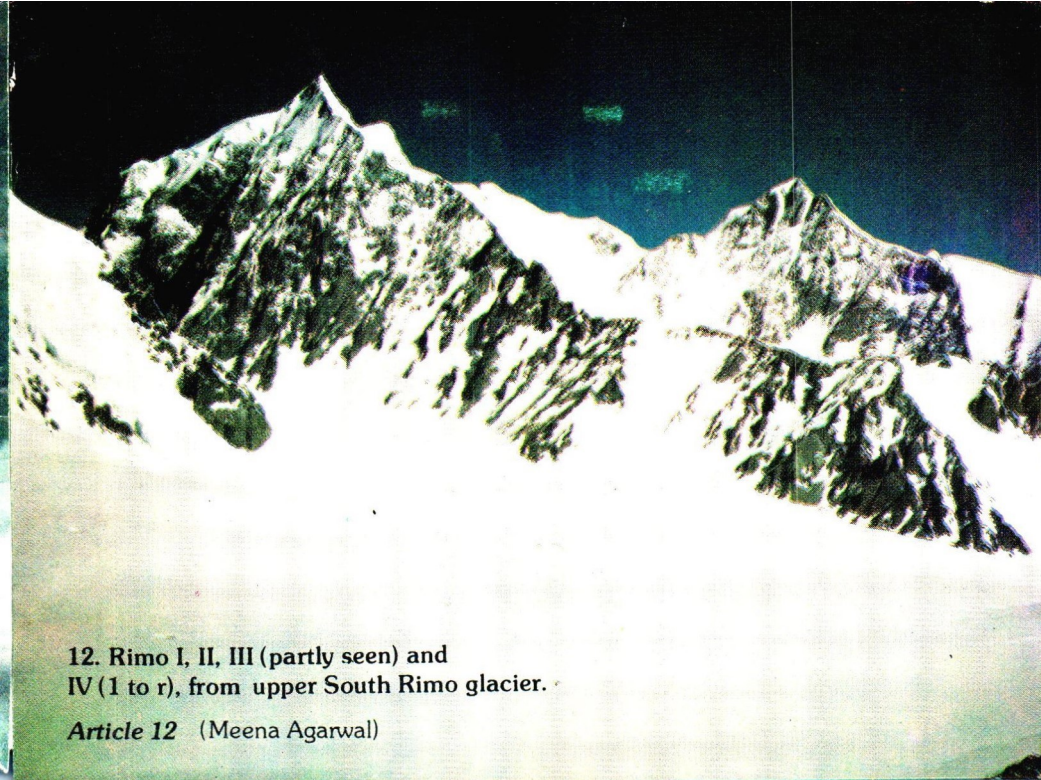
*Nomenclature in the Terong Valley: The Names
Proposed by the Siachen Indo-British Expedition,
1985*

'The nomenclature of a mountain region should not be forced: it should grow spontaneously, and we should never invent a name until its absence has become inconvenient.' Writing in 1906, Col Sir Sidney Burrard, then Superintendent of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India, gave his views as above. (See H.J. Vol. X, p. 86) Climbing in an area with many unnamed peaks and valleys, it *was* inconvenient to refer to them just by numbers and heights. The following names are proposed to the Survey of India. These names are given as per the guidelines given by the Survey of India in 'Himalayan Nomenclature', H.J. Vol. XXXI, p. 334.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
'Sundbrar'	Sundbrar — a beautiful place.
'Sondhi'	Sondhi — a sudden beautiful appearance. There is a place by the name of Sundbrar in Baltistan. Kashmiri Brahmins and Hindus along with several thousand people used to gather at this place on a certain day in June. They would worship the Hindu Goddess Laxmi and wait for the rising of water, praying for it to appear. At an appointed time a stream would fill the basin and the multitude would shout — 'Sondhi'. Above all, this phenomenon portrays the prevalence of the Hindu rituals deep inside the Muslim Baltistan (See <i>Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladak</i> , 1890 p. 801).
'Lharimo'	Holy, painted mountain.
'Doab'	Meeting place of two waters.
'Safina'	Boat. In Balti philosophy this is a special boat which carries one to heaven.
'Saigat'	Leopard's leap. This peak particularly tilts (leaps) towards the giant Rimo peaks.
'Chorten'	The Buddhist symbol.

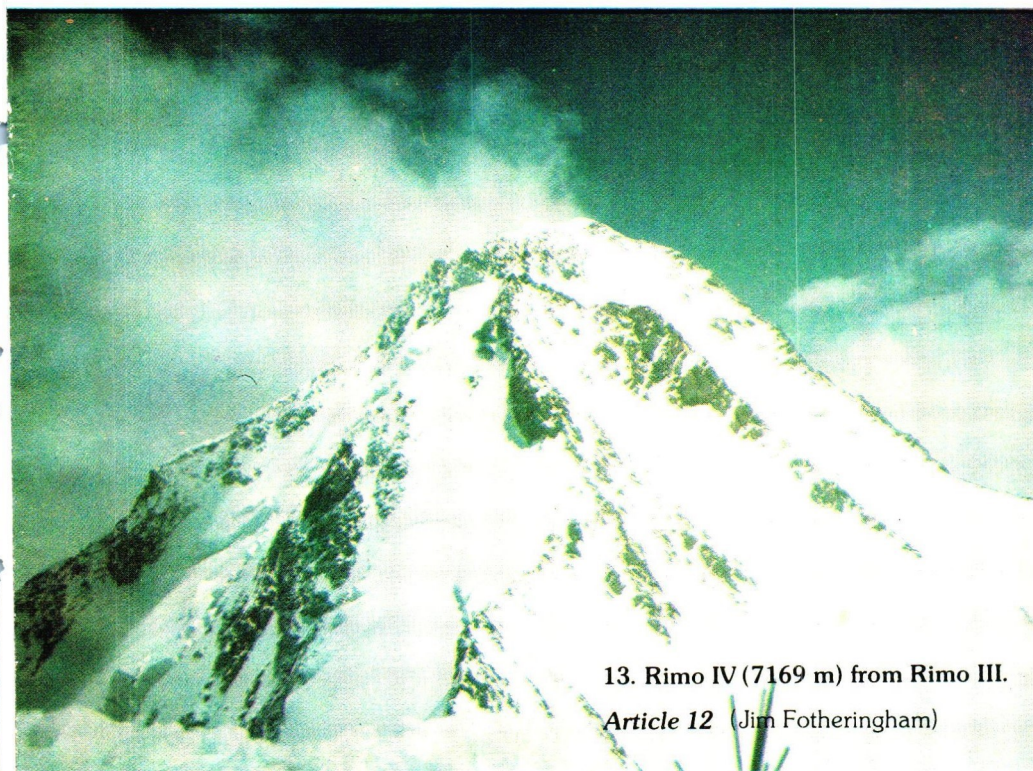
- 'Ngabong Terong' Ngabong — bactrian camel — the famous double-humped camel of Yarkand. A few are still seen in the Nubra valley.
- 'Siab Chushku' Siab — meeting place of three waters (North and South Terong and Shelkar Chorten glaciers).
Chushku — temporary camp.
- 'Doab Chushku' Temporary camp at meeting place of two waters. (Two branches of North Terong glacier).





12. Rimo I, II, III (partly seen) and
IV (1 to r), from upper South Rimo glacier.

Article 12 (Meena Agarwal)

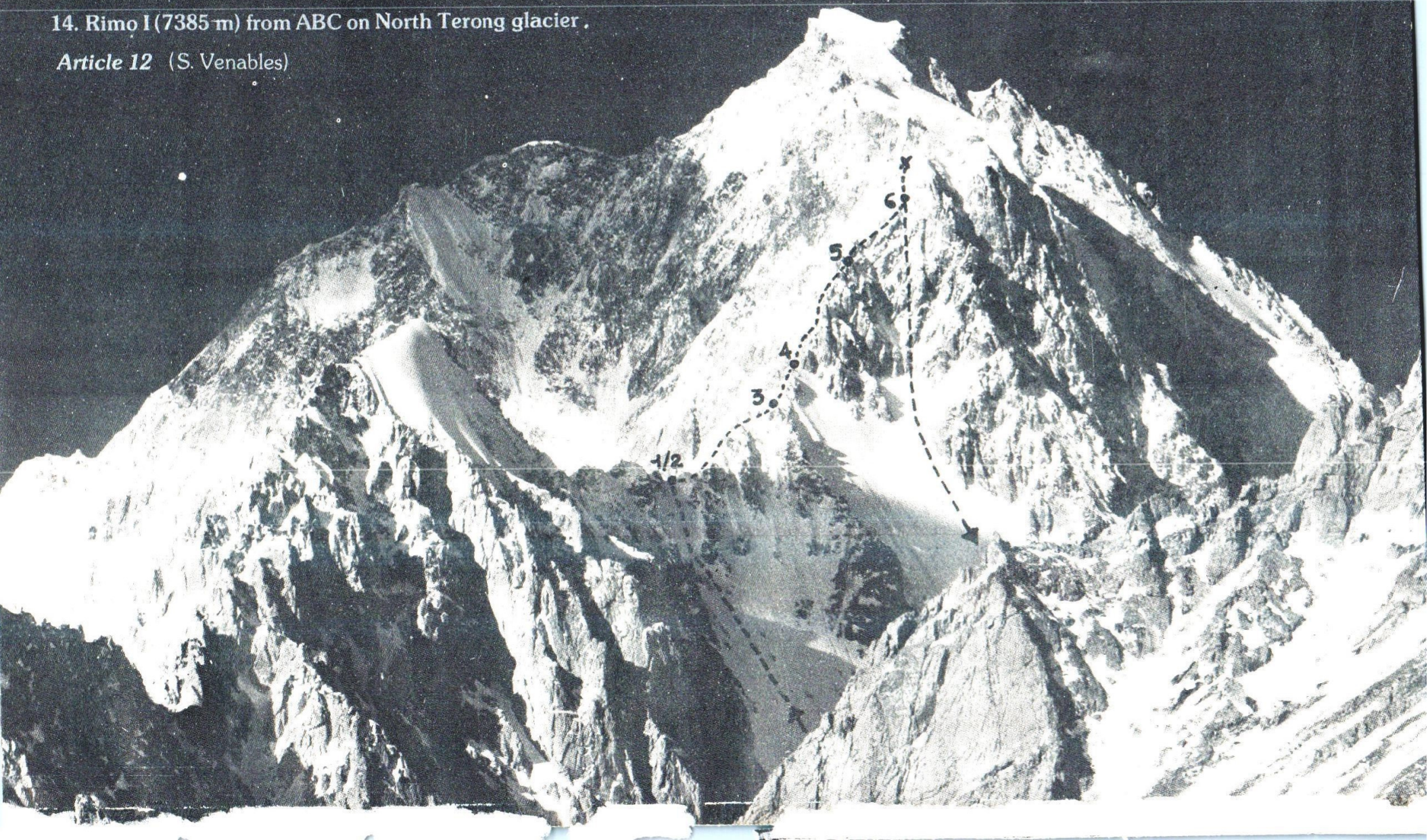


13. Rimo IV (7169 m) from Rimo III.

Article 12 (Jim Fotheringham)

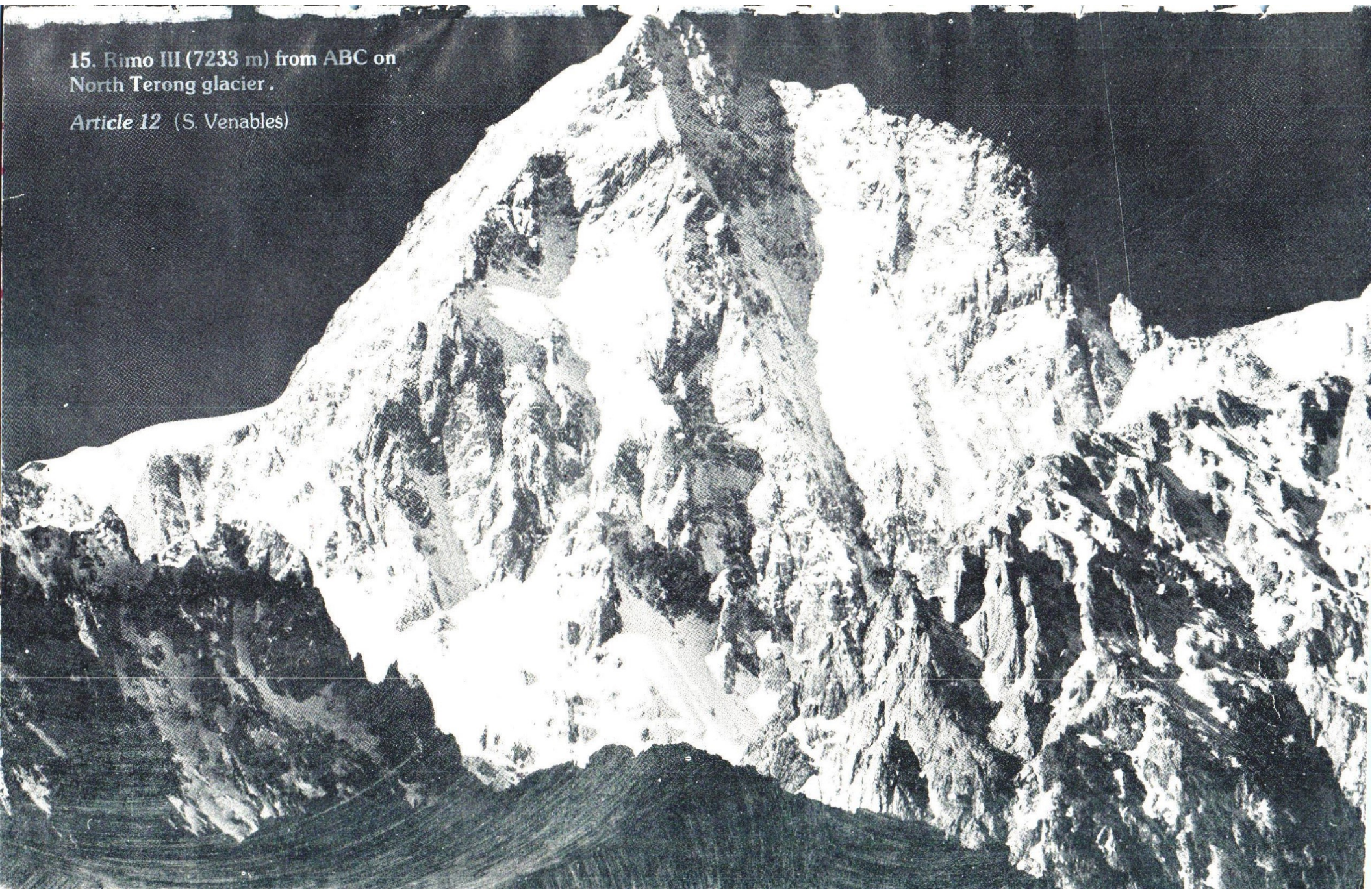
14. Rimo I (7385 m) from ABC on North Terong glacier.

Article 12 (S. Venables)



15. Rimo III (7233 m) from ABC on
North Terong glacier.

Article 12 (S. Venables)



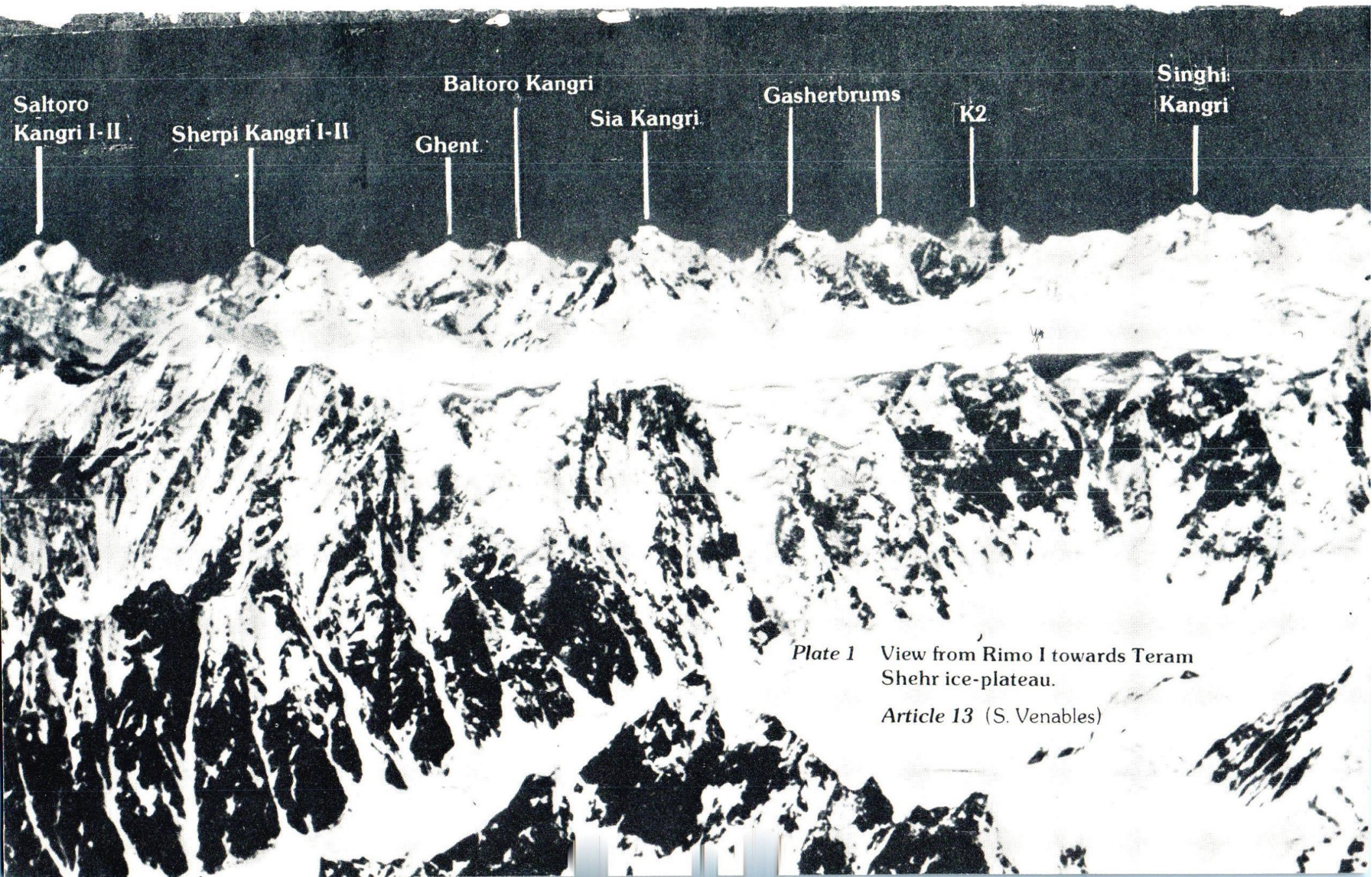


Plate 1 View from Rimo I towards Teram Shehr ice-plateau.

Article 13 (S. Venables)

Plate 2

At the entrance of Terong valley.

Article 13

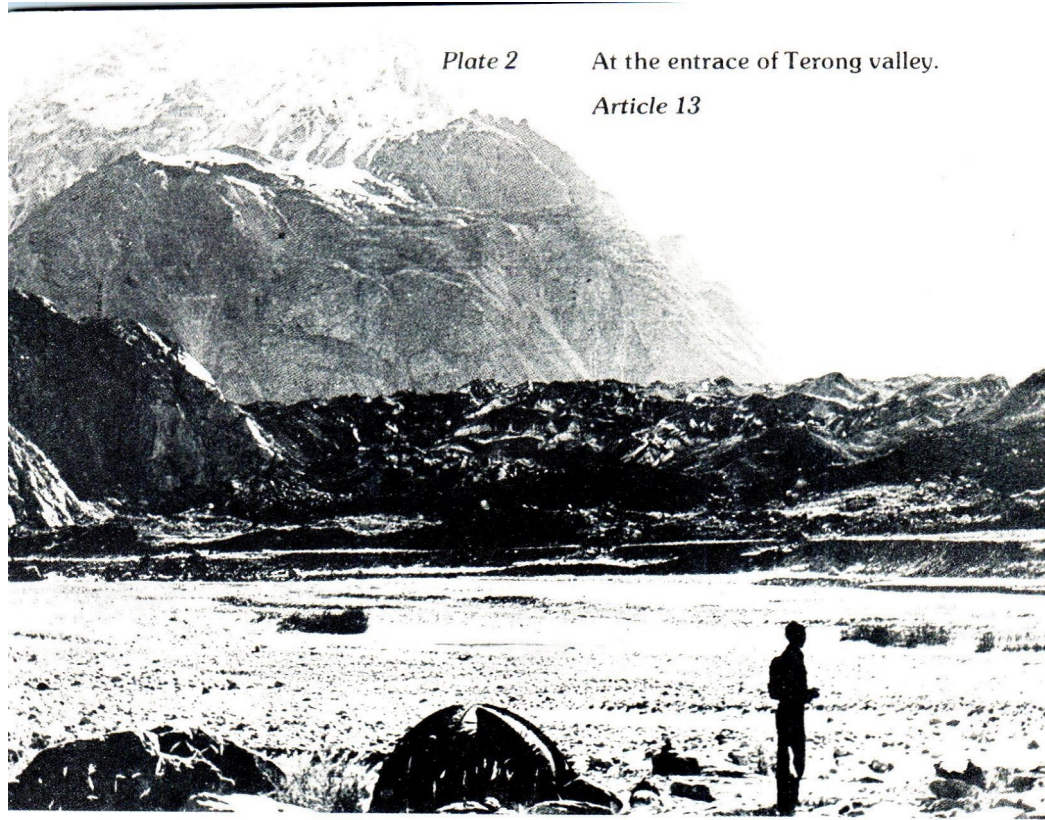
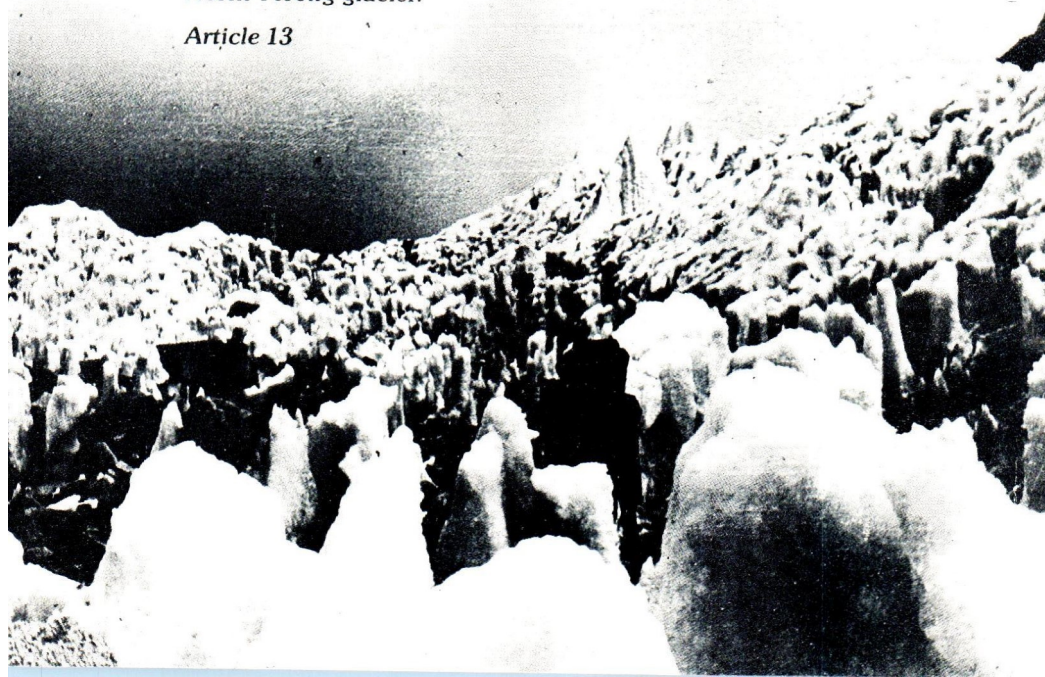


Plate 3

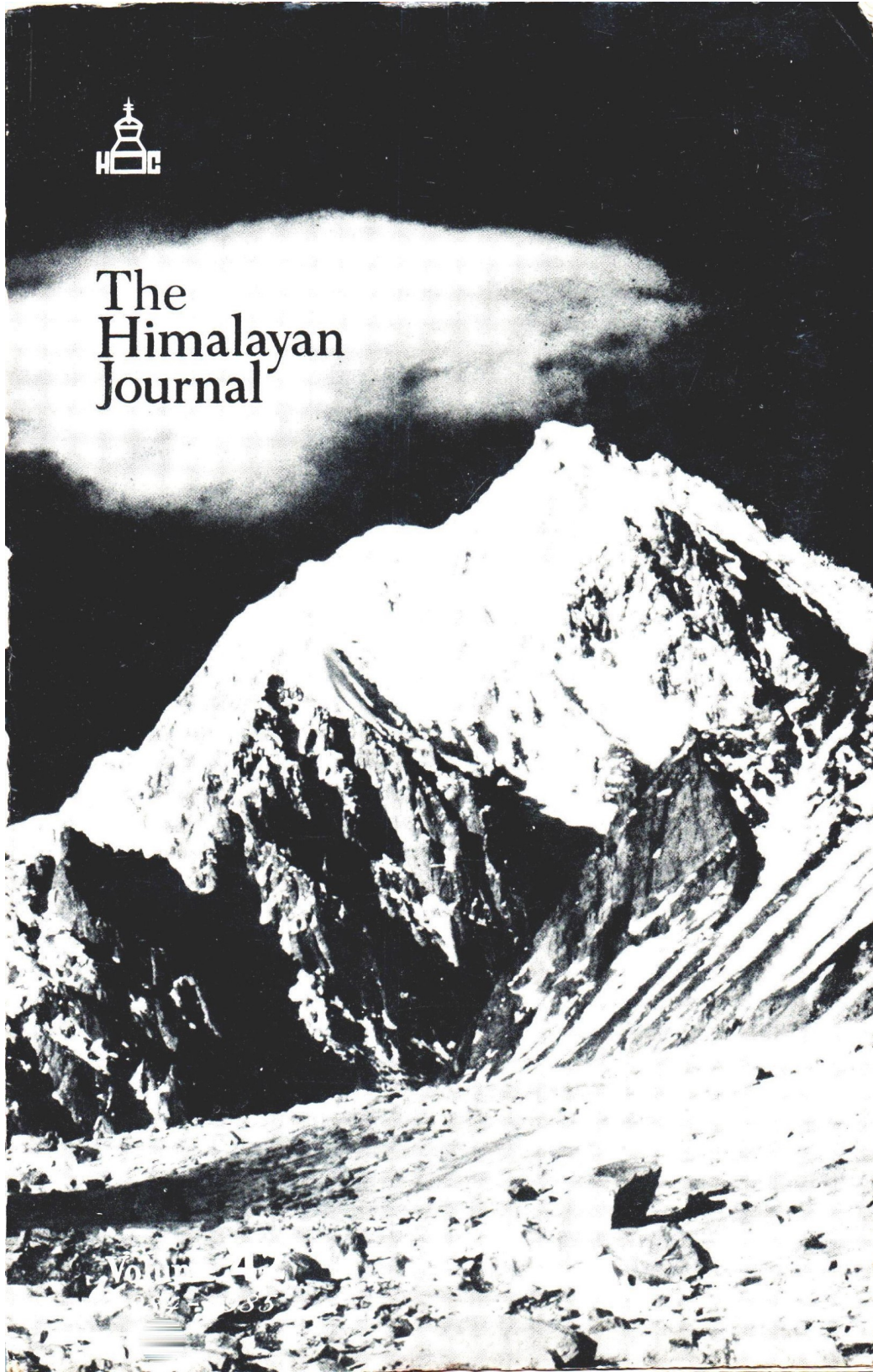
Ice-penitents in
North Terong glacier.

Article 13





The Himalayan Journal



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