

EASTERN KARAKORAM : A HISTORICAL REVIEW

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THE EARLY EXPLORERS knew no boundaries except those of mountain ranges. The present day mountaineers and explorers have to confine within political boundaries and territorial regulations. It is significant, hence, that only since 1984 all the ranges of the Eastern Karakoram are now opened to climbers by the Indian Government. While planning for the Siachen Indo-British Expedition, 1985 to the Terong valley, initially one felt that the area is not frequented, remote, information scarce and approach difficult. However, upon a little research it was found that more than forty parties had visited the area. The information and various references were scattered over a large number of books and journals. It is intended, in the present article to gather all this information, not exhaustively, but substantially. Eastern Karakoram has many opportunities for climbing and exploration and it is bound to receive many mountaineering parties in the future. In early days, caravans from Srinagar to the Siachen snout took nearly fifty days and now it would be a five day journey!

The Eastern Karakoram consists of (a) the Siachen Muztagh, (b) the Rimo Muztagh and (c) the Saser Muztagh as a sub-group of the Great Karakoram.¹ All these groups consist of various sub-groups and peaks as classified in the Karakoram Conference report of 1936. Out of these the Siachen Muztagh was explored thoroughly, while the Rimo Muztagh and Saser Muztagh received a few parties.

(A) *The Siachen Muztagh*

The peaks surrounding the Siachen glacier basically form this group. In 1821, W. Moorcroft passed near its snout and first acknowledged its existence.² In 1835 G. T. Vigne approached it from the west trying to reach the Bilafond la, but he never guessed the existence of such a large glacier across the divide.³ In 1848 Henry Strachey was the first to discover the existence of the 'Saichar' glacier and ascended it for two miles from the snout in the Nubra valley.⁴ In the same year, Dr Thomas Thompson⁵ also reached the glacier followed by F. Drew in 1849-50.⁶ E. C. Ryall of Survey of India sketched the lower part in 1861. But he ascribed to it a length of only sixteen miles. During his famous second Karakoram journey in 1889, Sir Francis Younghusband approach-

Fold out sketch 3

ed over the Urdok valley to reach Turkestan la. Looking down to the Siachen from north he felt that this was the main axis of the Karakoram.⁷ This was finally confirmed by Dr T. G. Longstaff in 1909.⁸ In fact, it was Dr Longstaff with Dr Arthur Neve and Lt Slingsby who were the first real explorers to traverse this great glacier. First, they came over the Bilafond la (or, Saltoro pass, as Dr Longstaff would have preferred to call it) and named the opposite glacier as 'Teram Shehr' and peaks as Teram Kangri, after a Yarkandi legend: 'The learned men of Balti say that a large town was said to stand at the present site of the Teram Shehr. Yarkandis from this town often crossed to Baltistan to loot cattle and destroy villages. To protect, Mullah Hazrat Amir gave the villagers a Tawiz (magic amulet) which was placed on the Bilafond la. Soon after, a great storm engulfed Teram Shehr destroying it and today not even grass and burtza would be found to mitigate the rocky desolation of Teram Shehr.'⁹ After retreating to Nubra valley, Dr Longstaff came up the Siachen snout from the south and saw the same peaks as identified from Bilafond la. Thus, he conclusively proved the length of Siachen glacier and the actual location of the Turkestan la. This was an important discovery as it now established the true boundaries of the Karakoram. He wrote:

'Younghusband was a true prophet. Col Burrard of the Survey had suspected the truth. The avalanche-swept pass, whose foot Younghusband had reached 20 years before, was on the main axis of the Karakoram range which thus lay miles farther north than had been believed. We had stolen some 500 sq miles from the Yarkand river system of Chinese Turkestan, and joined it to the waters of the Indus and the Kingdom of Kashmir.'⁸

The next most important explorers were the famous Workman expedition in 1911-12. They entered over the Bilafond la and camped on the glacier with a large entourage of porters and two Alpine guides. They visited and named Indira Col, after Goddess Laxmi. (With the recent political developments there is a misconception that this col, now the northernmost point of India, is named after India's late Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi. This is not true as the name was given in 1912 by Workman. See p. 186 of their book.) In a month long survey they climbed many peaks and visited almost all corners of the upper Siachen.

Grant Peterkin was a surveyor attached to this expedition. He surveyed the glacier thoroughly and named a few peaks, particularly Apsarasas and Ghent.

In 1929 Dr Ph.C. Visser of the Netherlands was on his fourth trip to the Karakoram.¹⁵ They discovered the two Terong glaciers and the Shelkar Chorten glacier which were unknown till then.

Dr Rudolf Wyss and surveyor Khan Sahib Afraz Gul stayed in the Terong valley and mapped the area. Thus they completed surveying the lower part of this great glacier.

At the same time, in 1929, Duke of Spoleto expedition (Italian) crossed the Karakoram by Muztagh pass and reached Indira Col from north. They descended from Turkestan la after discovering Staghar and Singhi glaciers. In 1930 Professor Giotto Dainelli completed the survey and exploration of this area. Coming over from the south he established himself at the Teram Shehr junction in early June; ' . . . thus reaching the Siachen tongue with all my baggage, a caravan of seventy coolies and six and a half tons of food for the men, carried by an additional caravan of ponies and supplementary coolies. On the 9th of June — exactly two months after my departure from Florence — I was heading for my first depot up the glacier. I hope my English colleagues will appreciate this rapidity of execution, which I consider a record!'¹² Compare this with the present timings! Dainelli, with his only companion Miss Kalau, stayed at the Teram Shehr junction and carried out various geological surveys. Due to the flooding of Nubra, he could not return by the same route and hence crossed a 20,000 ft pass to Rimo glaciers in the east. He named this Italy Col (Col Italia). With this, the survey and exploration of the Siachen in major respect was over. It was now left to climbers to attempt the various high peaks in this area. These climbing activities are tabulated at the end of this article.

All these recent expeditions arrived at the Siachen glacier from the west over Bilafond la or Sia la. In 1978-80 and 1981 Indian Army teams entered the glacier from the Nubra valley in the south and made excellent ascents. In 1984 a Japanese team approaching Rimo from the west over Bilafond la was turned back. India had firmly taken control over the area stopping all accesses from the west and north. From 1985 this area is selectively open for climbers approaching from Leh and Nubra.

(B) *The Rimo Muztagh*

The Rimo glacier which is the main source of the Shyok has received very few visitors or climbers. Its end had been only roughly sketched by Johnson in 1864 and Robert Shaw in 1869. Sir Filippo De Filippi expedition of 1914 explored this great glacier and its feeders, thereby connecting with the Peterkin survey of 1912. Next in line were the Indian Army Engineers expedition, after 70 years, in 1984 which climbed Rimo IV. The Siachen Indo-British Expedition of 1985 crossed over from the Terong valley to climb Rimo III. They narrowly failed on Rimo I. The Terong group (North and South Terong glaciers) and the Shelkar Chorten glacier were also thoroughly explored by this expedition (55 years

after Vissers). In all eight peaks were climbed and various passes and cols reached linking the Siachen/Terong to Rimo/Shyok valleys. They approached from Siachen glacier thus linking both Muztaghs.

Mamostong Kangri was first explored at close range by Dr A. Neve and was surveyed by De Filippi's expedition. This peak was ascended by an Indo-Japanese expedition in 1984 approaching from the south over the Mamostong and Thangman glaciers.

(C) *The Saser Muztagh*

Saser Kangri area was first reached by Arthur Neve in 1899. In 1909 and 1922, the Longstaff and Visser expeditions reached it respectively. The main reconnaissance was carried out by J. O. M. Roberts in 1946. He reached all the peaks of Saser and surrounding areas. In 1956 an Indian expedition led by N. D. Jayal, in 1969 led by C. S. Nogyal and in 1970 by H. V. Bahuguna failed to climb this peak reaching high on Cloud Peak or Saser IV. Both Roberts' and Jayal's teams climbed the nearby 'Look-Out Peak'. The first ascent of Saser Kangri was made by an Indian team led by Joginder Singh in 1973 approaching from the Shyok valley in the east. Indian Army team led by Col Jagjit Singh made the second ascent of this peak.

An Indo-Japanese expedition led by Hukam Singh climbed the west peak of Saser Kangri II (7518 m) in 1985. This expedition approached from the Nubra valley and climbed the northwest ridge over a col.

All the other groups in this Muztagh have not been visited and await exploration.

A Philistine may question the validity of all these 'explorations'. With the Central Asia Trade Route passing through these areas many local traders have known the terrain for years. Prof G. Dainelli puts the Eastern Karakoram explorations in the correct perspective:

'Someone might philosophize on the illusion we live in, we who believe we are exploring and discovering that which other men, instead, have known before us, perhaps for centuries. But we explore and discover for the sake of general knowledge and of science, and we cannot feel diminished if only in this sense be understood the discovery of the Yarkand source from the Rimo, made sixteen years ago, or the so-called first crossing of the col between Rimo and Siachen.

For geography and for science, as well as for alpinism, it has certainly been the first crossing.*

* A Journey to the Glaciers of the Eastern Karakoram: A paper read at the Evening Meeting of the Society (RGS) on 11 January 1932, by Professor Giotto Dainelli, Accademia d'Italia. *Geographic Journal*, Vol. LXXIX, No. 4, April 1932.

HISTORY OF SIACHEN MUZTAGH (1821-1985)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Expedition</i>	<i>Bibliography reference no.</i>
1821	W. Moorcroft passed near the snout and reported the existence.	2
1835	G. T. Vigne approached it from the west over Bilafond la but never guessed its existence.	3
1848	Henry Strachey discovered the existence of Siachen glacier and ascended it for two miles.	4
1848	Dr T. Thompson visited the snout.	5
1949-50	F. Drew approached the glacier.	6
1862	E. C. Ryall — Survey of India, sketched the lower part and ascribed it a length of only 16 miles.	
1889	Sir F. Younghusband reached Turkestan la from north and looked down on the glacier.	7
1907	Sir Sidney Burrard published a map on Himalaya. It did not include Siachen though he mentioned the possibility of a large glacier.	14
1908	Dr Arthur Neve and D. G. Oliver reached the snout and explored Mamostong Kangri.	10 G.J. 38
1909	Dr Tom Longstaff, Dr Arthur Neve and Lt A. M. Slingsby, later joined by Capt D. G. Oliver, first came over Bilafond la and later over the Siachen snout to establish the length of the Siachen glacier and exact location of various passes.	8
1911-12	The Workman Expedition came from west, named many peaks and passes and climbed a few peaks. Grant Peterkin surveyed the glacier thoroughly.	9
1911	V. D. B. Collins and C. S. McInnes of Survey of India surveyed Teram Kangri and other peaks.	10

<i>Year</i>	<i>Expedition</i>	<i>Bibliography reference no.</i>
1913-14	Sir Filippo De Filippi surveyed Rimo glacier system and published a map.	13
1929	Dr Ph. C. Visser, Netherlands expedition, surveyed Terong valleys and crossed the snout to Gyong la.	H.J. III, p. 13
1929	Duke of Spoleto expedition reached Indira Col from the north and discovered Staghar and Singhi glaciers.	H.J. III, p. 102
1930	G. Dainelli, Italian expedition, stayed two months at Teram Shehr junction and crossed Col Italia.	12
1934	G. O. Dyhrenfurth, International expedition, made first ascent of Sia Kangri.	H.J. VII, p. 142
1935	British Expedition led by J. Waller with John Hunt attempted Saltoro Kangri.	H.J. VIII, p. 14
1939	Lt Peter Young visited Gyong la on shikar.	16
1956	Austrian expedition led by F. Moravec climbed Sia Kangri West.	H.J. XX, p. 27
1957	Imperial College British expedition led by Eric Shipton climbed Tawiz and visited passes.	H.J. XXI, p. 33
1961	Austrian expedition led by E. Waschak made first ascent of Ghent.	H.J. XXIII, p. 47
1962	Japanese-Pakistan expedition led by T. Shidei made first ascent of Saltoro Kangri I.	H.J. XXV, p. 143
1974	Japanese expedition led by T. Tanaka attempted Sherpi Kangri II via S ridge.	HC NL. 31, p. 4
1974	Austrian expedition led by W. Stefan climbed Sia Kangri from SW.	HC NL. 31, p. 5 A.A.J. 49
1974	Japanese expedition led by G. Iwatsubo approached K12 from the west. Two members summited but died on the return without any trace.	HC NL. 31, p. 4

<i>Year</i>	<i>Expedition</i>	<i>Bibliography reference no.</i>
1975	British expedition led by D. Alcock attempted Sherpi Kangri.	
1975	Japanese expedition led by Y. Yamamoto climbed K12 by the same route to search for the missing summiters. The search failed.	HC NL. 31, p. 16
1975	Japanese expedition led by H. Katayama made first ascents of Teram Kangri I and II, coming over Bilafond la.	HC NL. 31, p. 17
1975	Japanese expedition led by S. Yamamoto attempted Salto Kangri I.	HC NL. 31, p. 17
1976	Japanese expedition made first ascent of Sherpi Kangri, led by H. Hirai.	H.J. XXXV, p. 254
1976	Japanese expedition led by H. Misawa made the first ascent of Apsarasas I.	HC NL. 32, p. 20
1976	Japanese expedition led by H. Sato came over Bilafond la crossed Turkestan la and made the first ascent of Singhi Kangri from north.	HC NL. 32, p. 19
1976	An Austrian expedition led by Gunther Schutz came over Bilafond la and attempted Salto Kangri II.	HC NL. 32, p. 19
1977	Austrian expedition climbed Ghent NE from Kondus glacier.	HC NL. 32, p. 34
1978	Indian Army expedition led by Col N. Kumar approached from Nubra and climbed Teram Kangri II.	H.J. 37, p. 107
1978	Japanese expedition led by H. Kobayashi climbed Ghent NE from the Kondus glacier.	HC NL. 33, p. 7
1979	Japanese expedition led by S. Hanada came over Bilafond la and made first ascent of Teram Kangri III.	HC NL. 33, p. 23
1979	Japanese expedition led by R. Hayashibara climbed Sia Kangri from Conway Saddle, descended S face to Siachen glacier and trekked out via Bilafond la.	HC NL. 33, p. 24

<i>Year</i>	<i>Expedition</i>	<i>Bibliography reference no.</i>
1980	Indian Army expedition led by Brig K. N. Thadani climbed Apsarasas I.	H.J. 38, p. 124
1980	West German team led by B. Scherzer climbed Ghent.	HC NL. 34, p. 25
1980	An American team led by Galen Rowell traversed the Siachen glacier during their Karakoram Ski Traverse of major glaciers.	
1981	Dutch expedition attempted Salto Kangri II from the west.	HC NL. 36, p. 8
1981	Indian Army expedition led by Col Kumar came via Nubra, climbed Salto Kangri II, Sia Kangri I, reached Indira Col, Sia la, Turkestan la and Pk 36 glacier pass.	H.J. 39, p. 104
1983	Trekking parties crossed over Bilafond la from the west.	
1984	Indian Army expedition led by Col Prem Chand climbed K12 from Siachen glacier traversing from the west.	H.J. 41, p. 90
1985	Indo-British expedition led by Harish Kapadia, explored and climbed peaks in Terong group. They approached from Siachen, climbed Rimo III and attempted Rimo I.	H.J. 42, p. 68

Nomenclature of Peaks in Eastern Karakoram

<i>Name</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Named by</i>
Kharpo Gang	White glacier	Dr U. Balestereri of Duke of Spoleto Italian Expedition 1929
Staghar	Many coloured	
Singhi	Difficult	
Apsarasas	Apsara — fairy sas — place (place for the fairies)	Grant Peterkin of Bullock Workman Expedition, 1911-12
Indira Col	Indira — Goddess Laxmi	

Name	Meaning	Named by
Tawiz	Magic amulet	Grant Peterkin of Bullock Workman Expedition, 1911-12
Hawk	Shaped like a hawk	
Siachen	Many roses (glacier)	
Sia Kangri	Rose Peak	
Ghent	Named after the Treaty of Ghent which terminated hostilities between Great Britain and United States in 1814	
Teram Shehr	Ruined town — as per the Yarkandi legend	Dr T. G. Longstaff in 1909
Teram Kangri	The peak of the ruined town	
Bilafond	Butterfly	
Mamostong Kangri	Mountain of thousand devils	Ladakhi/Yarkandi
Rimo	Striped mountain	Ladakhi/Yarkandi
Terong	Te — that, rong — valley (That valley) More scholarly interpretation would be; (g)ter — hidden rong — narrow gorge. (Hidden narrow gorge)	Ladakhi/Tibetan
Saser Kangri	Golden-earth ice-peak	Ladakhi

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HC NL: *Himalayan Club Newsletter*
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