

ARGANGLAS 2001

The Arganglas International Expedition 2001

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Report of the expedition by

Sir Chris Bonington and Harish Kapadia

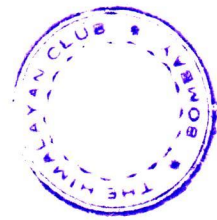
Leaders

Expedition dedicated to memory of



**Lt. Nawang Kapadia
(1975 – 2000)**







The Arganglas International Expedition 2001

2001**ARGANGLAS** 2001**ARGANGLAS** 2001**ARGANGLAS** 2001**ARGANGLAS** 2001

A team of mountaineers from India (4), U.K.(2) and U.S.A.(2) climbed in the Nubra Valley of Ladakh. The area is situated near the Siachen Glacier in the East Karakoram. The team made the first ascents of three peaks, explored 5 glaciers and attempted two peaks. No mountaineering party had ever visited this area. A large number of peaks are located around these two glaciers which were photographed and recorded.

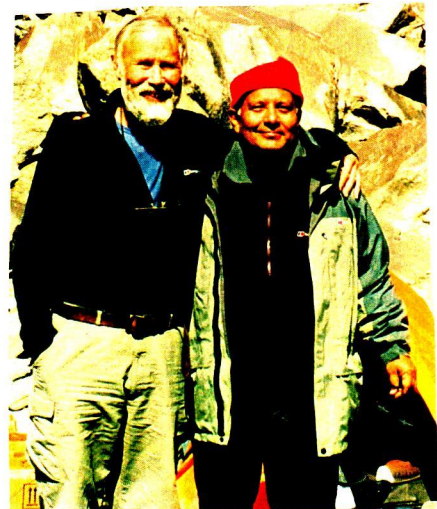
Leaders of the joint team were Sir Chris Bonington and Harish Kapadia. They had organised two expeditions jointly in the past in the Indian Himalaya ; to Panch Chuli Group (1992) and Rangrik Group (1994). Sir Chris Bonington is the legendary mountaineer from UK. He has organised expeditions to the highest ranges in the world including Everest SW Face, K2 and in Tibet. The other British member is Jim Lowther who is an expert on climbing in Greenland. Mark Richey has climbed in many major ranges in the world, including Everest, Latok in the Karakoram and Shiving east ridge. Mark Wilford has climbed Denali (Alaska), Eiger North Face solo (Switzerland), Nameless Tower (Pakistan), Cerro Torre (Patagonia) and attempted the North Face K2 from the Shaksgam valley. Both are most experienced mountaineers from USA.

Harish Kapadia has vast experience of exploring, climbing and organising expeditions in the Indian Himalaya. He has visited the East Karakoram several times before. The Indian team includes Divyesh Muni (ascents of Kamet, Rangrik Rang, Kagbhusand), Cyrus Shroff (ascents of Gya, Bhujang, Satopanth and Sri Kailash) and Lt Cdr S. Dam of Indian Navy (extensive visits to East Karakoram and most areas of the Indian Himalaya).

Captain Vrijendra Lingwal of Ladakh Scouts joined the expedition a liaison officer.



Clockwise:
Divyesh Muni, Capt. V. Lingwal
Cyrus Shroff , Satyabrata Dam



Leaders:
Sir Chris Bonington
Harish Kapadia

Brief History

There are several villages in the Nubra Valley and the historic trade route to Karakoram Pass crossed from here. The high passes were often impassable early in the winter season and traders from Central Asia who were unable to cross the passes back to their home, spent the long winter in the Nubra valley. Many of them stayed on. Children and families of these traders were brought up in the valley and are called Argans (or Arghons). Possibly the grazing area of Arganglas east of Tirit village was reserved for them. (Argan= foreigner, glas=grazing area).

The expedition gathered in Mumbai on 19th August 2001 and travelled by train to New Delhi and reached Leh by air. After acclimatising in Leh the team travelled by road across Khardung La, one of the highest motorable road in the world, to the Nubra valley. In Leh and at Partapur the team members called on the army authorities whose permissions and help are essential to climb in this restricted areas.

Trek to Base Camp

With 35 mules and a team of 12 permanent staff, we started the trek to Base Camp on 28th August 2001. The three day trail led us across Chamba La (pass) 3890 m / 12,760 ft , Wasekhar (3950 m / 12,960 ft), Phonglas (4620 m / 15,160 ft) to a base camp at the foot of the Phunangama Glacier (4800 m / 15,750 ft). The camp was set up in a dry lake bed and was to be our home for the next month. After ferrying loads two Advanced Bases were set up by 6th September. The AB1 was at the junction of the Nono Glacier with the Phunangma Glacier at 5300 m / 17,390 ft. The AB2 was on the latter glacier nearer to peaks at 5450 m / 17,880 ft. Both camps were well-stocked and various smaller teams used these camps to attempt and climb different peaks .

Climbs in the Phunangma and Nono Glaciers

After establishing AB1 and AB2 we divided in smaller teams and operated as small independent parties from there.

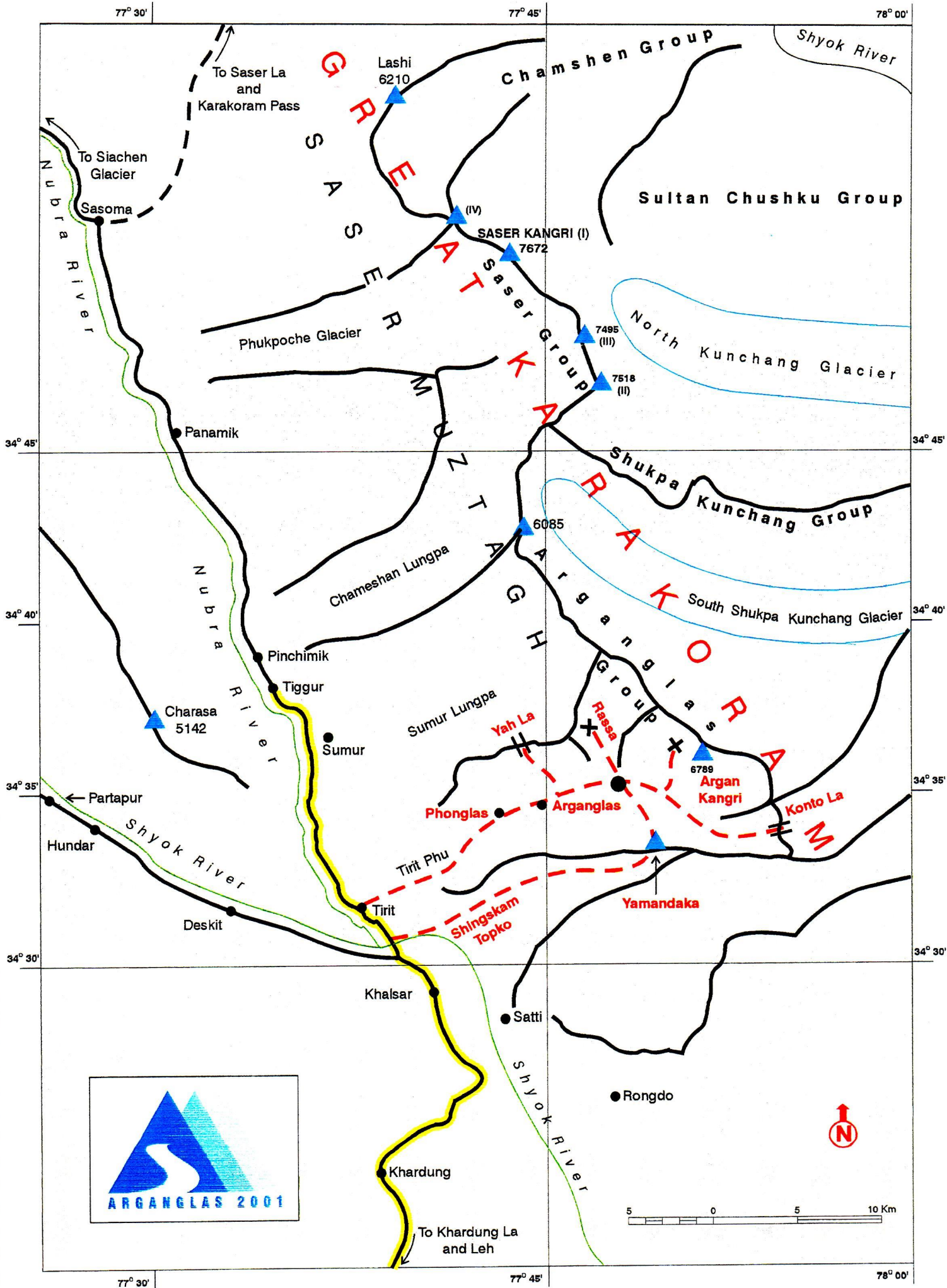
Konto La (5920 m / 19,422 ft)

A col between Karpo Kangri (6540 m / 21,460 ft) and Pk. 6640 m was at the eastern head of the Phunangma Glacier. This was reached by Bonington-Lowther on 7 September after a long walk along the moraine ridge. They also investigated the route to our future Camp 1 at the foot of Argan Kangri. They climbed a couple of hundred metres towards a high col to their south.

Abale (6360 m / 20,865 ft) and Amale (6312 m / 20,708 ft) Peaks

These two shapely peaks are situated on a side glacier, which we name as Nono Glacier. After an initial recce Camp1 was set up 5960 m / 19,560 ft. Muni, Shroff and Samgyal made the first ascent of Abale Peak on 9 September by climbing it via the west face. It was a climb through deep and soft snow as weather was not particularly stable during this time.

After 2 days another team of Dam, Capt. Lingwal and Wangchuk occupied the same camp and climb Amale Peak which is little to the north of the first peak. They obtained clear views from the summit. Both were first ascents of these peaks.



First Ascent of peak Yamandaka (6218 m) by its North Face and descent by the Shingskam Topko

From the day we arrived in BC below the Phunangma glacier, Mark Wilford and Mark Richey were at once captivated by the obvious and direct line on peak 6218's north face. The wall was estimated to be about 4000 ft high and a steep mix of rock and ice. The late afternoon sun delineated a sharp central rib which bisected the face and finished exactly at the summit. The line looked irresistible!

On the 8th of Sept. two Marks crossed the Phunangma and set camp at the base of the face beneath a huge boulder. Conditions were anything but ideal. The entire face was plastered with fresh snow and the weather still appeared unstable. In addition, they had spent only 6 days between 15,000 and 17,000 ft. so their acclimatization was marginal.

From Sept. 9th to the 12th Marks climbed over 20 pitches of 60 meters each of technical rock and ice on the face. All rock climbing was done with crampons in full winter conditions. A fair amount of direct aid was employed including 2 pendulums. They sack hauled on most of the pitches and the second jumared with a heavy pack. Several sections of frighteningly loose, stacked blocks had to be negotiated. At one point, a television sized rock, set loose by hand pressure, nearly severed the lead rope. The ice climbing was mainly confined to the initial four pitches of 45 degree snow and ice and then the final three pitches of water ice up to 70 degrees and including the final overhanging cornice. They had taken only three ice screws, anticipating névé on the summit icefields. They braved snowfall on all days except the 11th and topped out in a full blizzard which dumped nearly a foot of snow. They made three bivouacs on the face, the first two were excellent platforms and they were able to erect a small tent. The final open bivouac on the face was a narrow ledge chopped into a 50 degree ice slope. Heavy spindrift during the night kept them from much sleep. They also spent one night just below the summit.

The actual summit was reached on September 13th after the storm. Clearing skies allowed superb views of the surrounding mountains and ranges, all unclimbed and unexplored except for the two peaks that the Indians had just summited. There is phenomenal potential here for alpine style climbing on peaks up to 6800 meters. Due to the heavy snowfall their original plans of descent down the North East ridge to the Phunangma glacier seemed excessively dangerous. Instead, they opted for a descent down the South face of the mountain to a glacier system on the opposite side of the range. They hoped that this drainage would eventually link up to the Arganglas valley and with a little luck, a leisurely walk would see them back in base camp couple of days later.

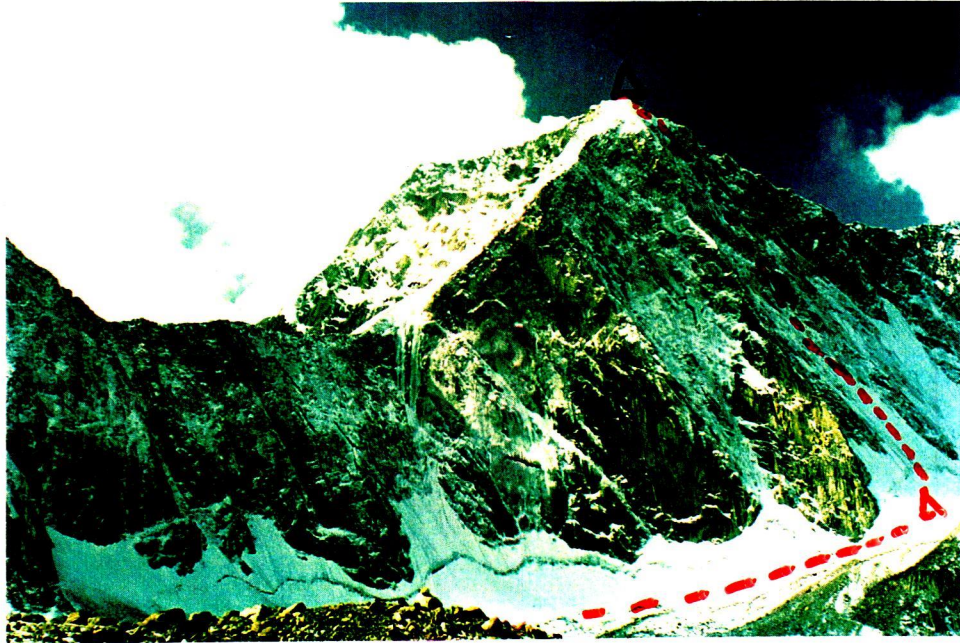
Nothing could have been further from the truth. In fact, the gentle disarming glacier ultimately funneled its way down into a steep and terrifying gorge leading all the way to the Nubra valley. By the time they realized this, they were too exhausted to retrace path, already day 7 on 5 days of food. Unwittingly, they committed ourselves to the canyon. Soon they found themselves rappelling directly through waterfalls and down narrow water filled channels. At one point Mark Wilford had to drop his pack half way down a rappel into a deep pool for fear of being drowned.

Finally, after ten hours of brutal descent, they stood atop a huge water fall longer than their rope. Beyond, the smooth canyon walls disappeared out of sight.

Unwilling to make this final commitment, they searched for an escape. One side of the canyon presented a slight weakness. Wilford led up a wall of huge blocks literally cemented in place with mud. As Mark put it "It was the most frightening pitch I have ever climbed" Two more vertical pitches of rock and 500 ft of scrambling led them finally to the Canyon rim and their 7th night out in the Shingskam Topko Valley.

The following morning, they descended to the Nubra valley where they met a very relieved porter sent down to look for them by Harish and Chris. That day expedition companions were ready to send out the search helicopter. Back at ABC, the team had built a lovely temple and prayed for their safety.

They named the climb 'Barbarossa' after the World War II German/Russian conflict and the book they had been reading in base camp. This was one of the fine achievements, comparable to some of the finest climbing done in the Indian Himalaya.



Yamandaka (6218 m), route of first ascent.



Mark Richey



Mark Wilford

Argan Kangri (6789 m)

This is the highest peak on the glacier and was one of the prime aims of the expedition. However bad weather and poor snow conditions did not allow an attempt on this peak till towards the last days of the expedition.

On 20 September Jim Lowther, Divyesh Muni, Cyrus Shroff, Samgyal Sherpa and Bonington waded through knee deep snow up the Central Arganglas Glacier to Argan Kangri. The snow had not consolidated since the storm and the risk of avalanche on the huge snow slope leading to the summit appeared too dangerous to be justifiable. They therefore decided to turn back and dropped down to advance base to find the two Marks who had arrived to join the team after rest.

Explorations in the Rassa and Yah Glaciers

Harish Kapadia and S. Dam with three porters formed an independent team and left to explore the above two glaciers in the area. A camp was first made in the Rassa glacier and from here they attempted **Thugu Peak** (6158 m / 20,203 ft). As they climbed higher unsettled rocks with deep fresh snow caused problems. There was no place to camp and they had to return from 5800 m / 19,030 ft. Next 2 days were spent in exploring the upper reaches of 5 branches of the unknown Rassa glaciers and photographing its peaks.

The party then traversed to west to enter the Yah Glacier which is near the shapely peak of Nya Kangri (6480 m / 21,260 ft). The glacier was full of rocky debris and no water was available except near the snout. They camped at the snout and proceeded along the glacier the next day. Covering ground on soft snow and across crevasse they camped at the foot of the pass at the northwestern head of the Yah Glacier. The steep pass, **Yah La** (5770 m / 18,930 ft), was reached on 23rd September but it was not possible to descend on the other side towards the Sumur Lungpa as intended. The party retraced route back to the Arganglas valley and joined the main team the next day.

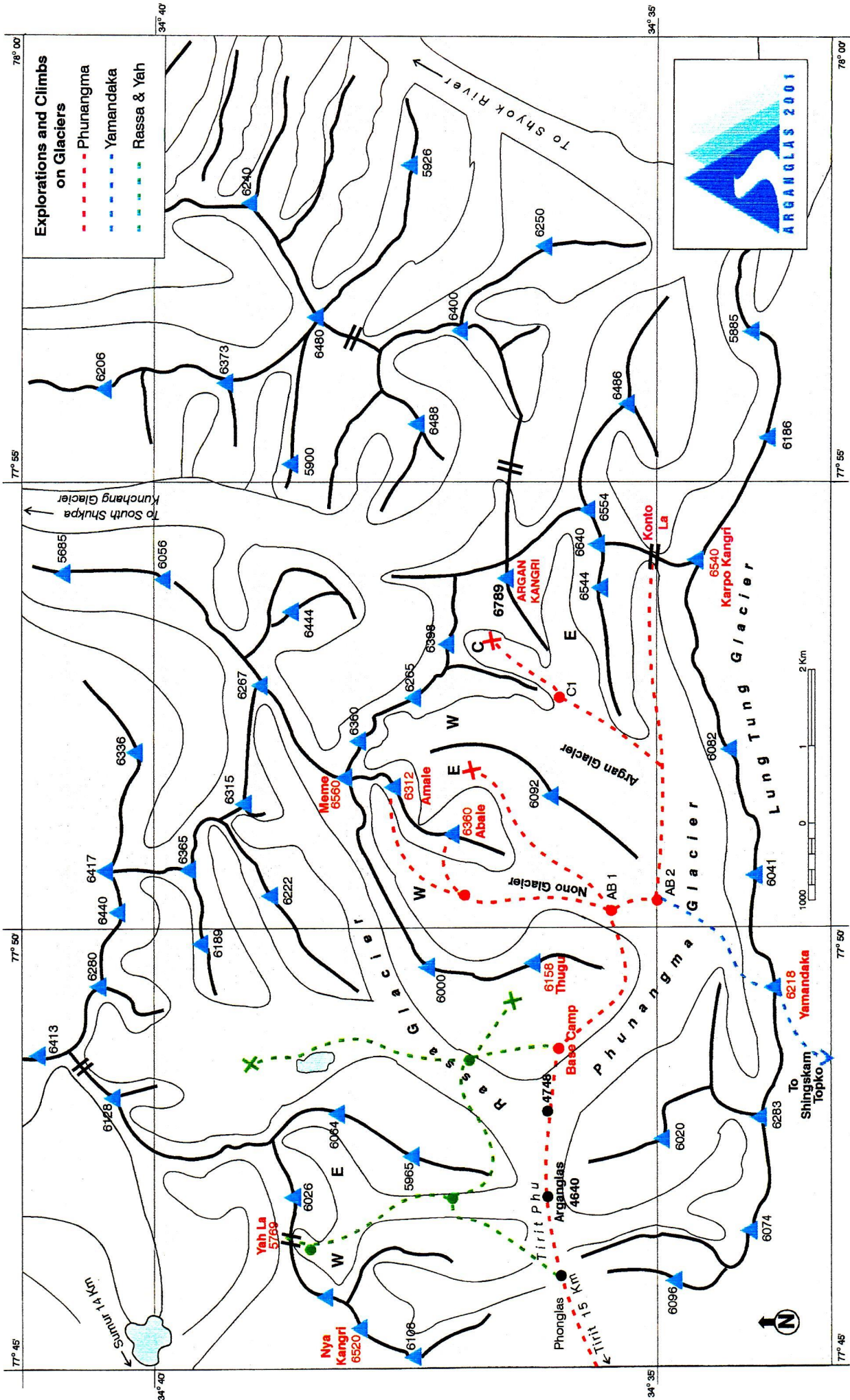
In view of the international situation and the fact that we now had winter conditions with the snow not clearing from the glaciers or the steepest slopes we decided to head for home.

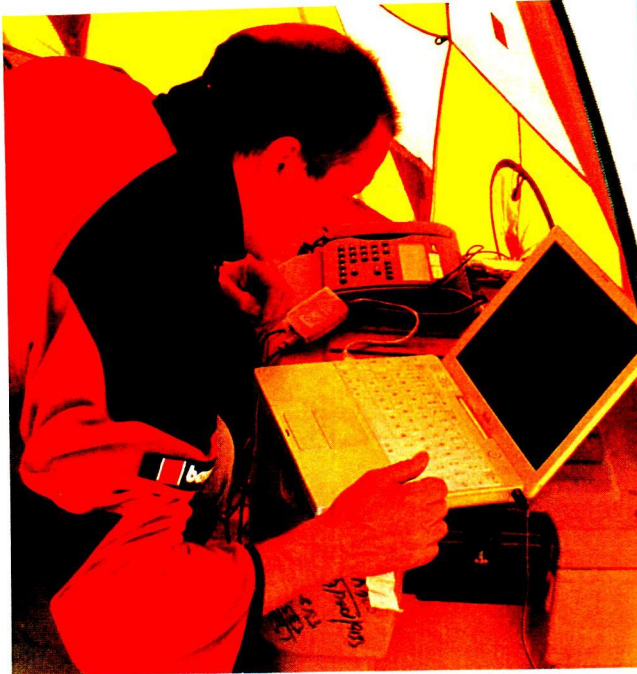
The expedition had much satisfying results: one major first ascent of Yamandaka by Mark Richey and Mark Wilford, two other first ascents by Divyesh Muni, Cyrus Shroff, Satya Dam and Vrijendra Lingwal. Harish Kapadia has explored the Rassa and Yah Glaciers. Jim Lowther and Bonington had done an awful lot of walking and reached Konto La at the head of the Phunangma Glacier.

It had been a superb expedition with everyone getting on really well together.

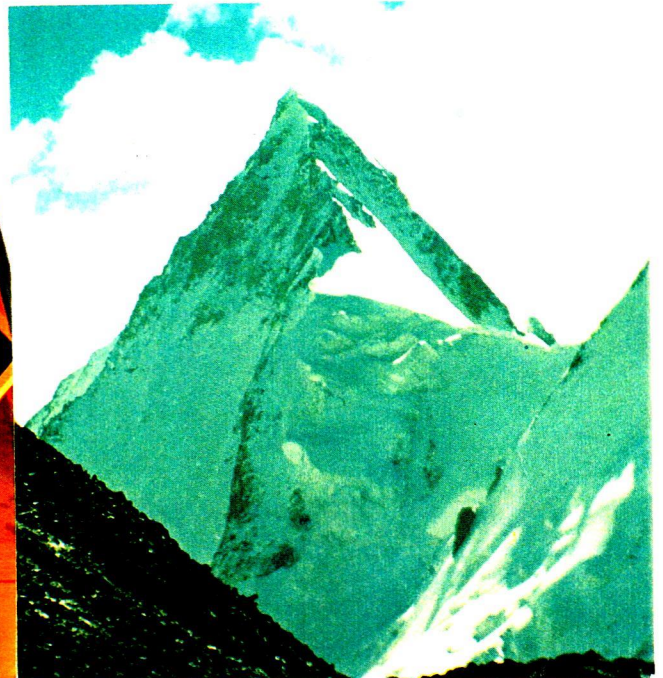
Peaks on the
unexplored
Rassa Glacier







Jim Lowther sending e-mail from BC.



Karpogangri (6540 m) on the Phunangma Glacier.

Technology

Thanks to Sir Chris Bonington, the expedition carried satellite phone and laptop. This enabled the team to send and receive e mails regularly and contact persons the world over. The expedition maintained a website which was updated regularly. Digital photos of activities, updated maps and text matters were hosted every few days. The final version and the report is available on the site.

Nomenclature

Climbing in an unexplored area there is always a confusion about names of peaks, passes and glaciers. In the Arganglas valley except the Phunangma and Rassa Glaciers no other names appeared on the map. Hence in accordance with the guidelines from Survey of India for naming, we have suggested the following new names in consultations with local Ladakhis.

Name	Meaning
Arganglas	Grazing ground of the Argans (or Arghons)
Phunangma	Phu – upper, Nangma- interior pastures. Upper Interior Pastures
Rassa	Place for animals
Argan Kangri	Kangri- peak. Highest peak of the Argan area
Yamandaka	A Buddhist God with 32 hands and fearsome looks to keep away the devil.
Meme	Grandfather
Abale	Father
Amale	Mother
Thugu	Small child
Nono	Child
Yah	A phenomena where water disappears underground.
Konto	Deep (between two peaks)
Nya Kangri	Nya- fish, Kangri – peak. Peak looking like a fish
Karpogangri	Karpo-white. Steep white peak.

SUMMARY OF THE EXPEDITION

Peaks

No.	Name and height	Date climbed / attempted	Summiteers	Remarks
1.	Abale Peak (6360 m / 20,865 ft)	9 September 2001	Divyesh Muni, Cyrus Shroff and Sherpa Samgyal	First ascent, from Camp 1 on the Nono Glacier following the west face.
2.	Amale Peak (6312 m / 20,708 ft)	11 September 2001	Capt. Lingwal, Lt. Cdr. S. Dam and Sherpa Wangchuk	First ascent, from Camp 1 on the Nono Glacier following the southwest ridge.
3.	Yamandaka (6218 m / 20,400 ft)	13 September 2001	Mark Richey and Mark Wilford	First ascent. Climbed a near vertical steep line on the north face in alpine style. They named the route as 'Barbarossa'. They descended to the south completing a traverse.
4.	Argan Kangri (6789 m / 22,273 ft)	20-23 rd September 2001	Sir Chris Bonington, Jim Lowther, Divyesh Muni, Cyrus Shroff and Sherpa Samgyal.	The highest peak on the glacier was investigated till 6200 m. Soft and unconsolidated snow conditions made it too difficult to climb it.
5.	Thugu Peak (6158 m / 20,203 ft)	19 th September 2001	Harish Kapadia Lt Cdr. S. Dam	The team followed the southwest ridge till 5800 m. Steep rocks and snow stopped the attempt.

Passes and Cols

No.	Name and height	Date reached	Persons	Remarks
1.	Konto La (5920 m / 19,422 ft)	7 September 2001	Sir Chris Bonington and Jim Lowther	A deep col at the head of the Phunangma Glacier and at the foot of Karpo Kangri. A small cairn was erected at the pass.
2.	Yah La (5770 m / 18,930 ft)	23 September 2001	Harish Kapadia, Lt Cdr. S. Dam with Naresh, Chamu Sinh and Sunder Sinh.	An unvisited pass at the head of the Yah Glacier was reached.
3.	South Col 5800 m / 19,028 ft)	8 September 2001	Sir Chris Bonington and Jim Lowther	A high col west of Peak 6041, attempted from AB2. Poor ice conditions stopped the climbers early.

Glaciers explored: Phunangma, Nono, Argan, Rassa and Yah Glaciers.

MEMBERS

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Sir Chris Bonington (Joint Leader) | 5. Cyrus Shroff |
| 2. Harish Kapadia (Joint Leader) | 6. Mike Richey |
| 3. Jim Lowther | 7. Mike Wilford |
| 4. Divyesh Muni | 8. Lt. Cdr. Satyabarata Dam (IN) |

Liaison Officer: Capt Vrijendra Lingwal (Ladakh Scouts)

Period: 19 August to 30 September 2001

Thanks for Help and support

Berghaus – Clothing, boots and rucsacks
 Patagonia - Clothing
 La Sportiva – Boots
 Wild Things – rucsacks and harnesses
 Beal - ropes
 Petzl – head torches
 Coleman – stoves and lamps

Lt. Gen. R. K. Nanavatty,
 (GOC, Northern Command)
 Lt. Gen. Arjun Ray, (GOC, 14 Corps)
 Brig. Ashok Duggal
 (Commander, 102 Inf. Brigade)

Maj. Gen. Randhir Sinh

Ravi and Paula Mariwala
 Dr Burjor Banaji
 Suman Dubey

The Indian Mountaineering Foundation
 N. N. Vohra, President, IMF
 Col. Ravinder Nath, Director, IMF
 Dr. M. S. Gill, President,
 The Himalayan Club

Rimo Expeditions, New Delhi

Sir Chris Bonington
 Joint Leader

Harish Kapadia
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15th October 2001

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