
THE GOD THAT DID NOT FAIL

A Journey Across the Shyok and Nubra Valleys

HARISH KAPADIA

The Japanese do everything in style. When I visited Japan few years ago, a translator was to remain with me all along, for everybody speaks in Japanese. She translated everything into English in my ear and slowly you get into a blissful state that makes you keep looking at the person talking to you, you keep nodding and smiling, but you are listening to what is being said in your ear by the translator. Later I kept on nodding as one gentleman talked to me, and put my ear towards the lady to listen to what he was saying, she said, 'He is speaking in English!' and with embarrassment, I looked up at him. He was telling me, 'Mr. Kapadia, why don't you organise an expedition with the Japanese mountaineers someday?' That was the germ that was planted in my mind... one of these days we must organise a joint expedition with our Japanese friends. In late 2001 I wrote to the Japanese Alpine Club to inquire about the possibilities of a joint expedition to the remote areas of Eastern Karakoram, particularly going along the Shyok, the winter route to the Karakoram Pass and crossing over towards the Siachen glacier. After a while came their response... that they would join us and Hiroshi Sakai was appointed as leader from their side.

I applied for the permission and once it was granted, I sent the good news by e-mail to Sakai. But none of this e-mail business for the Japanese, may be because of difference in language. He sent a message that he and his wife would be arriving in Mumbai to discuss and finalise the plans for our trip. They arrived and again it was in proper style, in a special boardroom that we discussed plans. Later I offered to show them the city.

In halting English he said that Mrs. Sakai was a train enthusiast and all that they would like to see is an express train departing from

Photo 24 to 33, 35-36, Panorama C

Fold-out Sketches 1-2

Eastern Karakoram Route of Indo-Japanese Expedition 2002



Mumbai railway station. I was only too happy to do so, being a train enthusiast myself. So there we were, flagging off the Rajdhani Express on its way to Delhi and to complete the pleasure, the next day we went up to a local hill station, Matheran by a hill railway. That was the most wonderful beginning to our Indo-Japanese expedition to the East Karakoram.

Hiroshi Sakai was a thorough professional, thorough organiser and a gentleman. On such long expeditions with people from different cultures where particularly there is a barrier of language, many things can go wrong. Not in our case, as we understood each other too well. In fact while we were on the mountains, relations between India and Pakistan deteriorated considerably and all foreign nationals in India were advised to return. The Indian army assured us that we were in safe hands and nothing could go wrong. Based on this assurance, Sakai did not budge at all from our plans and stood firmly for going ahead on our climb and exploration.

Finally on 17 May 2002, we were at the Shyok village, ready to start on our long Karakoram journey covering the two large valleys of the Shyok and the Nubra rivers. It was an ambitious plan, traversing this forbidding terrain, first along the Shyok crossing it more than 24 times, visiting Karakoram Pass, crossing Col Italia, exploring the Teram Shehr Plateau and finally descending via the Siachen glacier. In between all this, we planned to climb the 7030 m virgin peak Padmanabh. Ambitious enough. We were five Japanese and six Indian mountaineers accompanied by an army officer as liaison officer.

‘Where are your horses to ride?’ The *Lamberdar*¹ was asking us. We had 55 horses, but only two of us were riding. It was normal for Sahibs to ride on the Karakoram trail. From Younghusband, Shipton, and British officers to army officers today, they all rode the sturdy Karakoram mules. ‘It is crazy to go to walking along the Shyok, an absolutely mindless thing to do’, he emphasised. But mountaineers are known for this trait and we started our trek along the Shyok. We were in the nick of time, for water levels in the Shyok were rising and within a week the route would be closed. This trail from the Shyok village to Karakoram Pass is the ‘Winter Trail’, used in the winter when the Shyok was crossable. Way back in 19th century, the British tried to built a trail by blasting rocks on the left bank so that crossings could be minimised. One could see the blast charges on the rocks and at many places the trail was running on the opposite bank to ours. But as plans

¹ Village headman.

to build a trail were later abandoned, the Ladakhi caravans now go by the traditional route crossing and re-crossing the Shyok river more than 5 to 6 times per day, as they had done for generations. Sometimes, in the earlier part of the journey, the water would reach waist level or above and horses would cross with some difficulties and plodding by their owners. The owners would always jump on a horse loaded with luggage and would safely see themselves across. The hardy mountaineers of our party would hold hands and mastering the technique, go across the Shyok. It was fun, as somebody said, but rather cold and very tiring when we finished with it.

We had come a long way from Leh having spent five days to acclimatise and to complete army formalities. We were entering into border areas where no foreigners had been allowed for last 40 years and even the Indian civilian parties had been far and few. In Leh we visited the Moravian church established in 1885 by Father Andrade. Father Gergen, who at present runs the church, showed us around its old Persian carpets and a room where Aurel Stein's leg was amputated by Dr. Schmidt. We visited the old graveyard with him. There was a memorial to Ferdinand Stolickzka, who was a naturalist attached to the Central Asian Mission of Sir Thomas Douglas Forsyth. He died at Murgo on 19 July 1874 and a tower has been erected here in his memory.

Next to this tower was a simple grave which contained the bones of Andrew Dalgleish, who crossed Karakoram Pass for trade with Central Asia. Robert Shaw had formed the 'The Central Asian Trading Company' (like the East India Trading Company which ruled India) and Dalgleish worked for it. On one of his trading journeys, he was murdered by an Afghan while camping near Karakoram Pass. The company continued for some years after his murder. The remains of Dalgleish were carried to Leh and he was finally buried near the grave of Stolickzka.

In those days, travel along the Karakoram Pass route was challenging and only hardy persons would survive. 'With others if we can, alone if we must', was their motto. This route had come into prominence during the India-China war in 1962. The area immediately to the east of it along the watershed was taken over by the Chinese troops and today the watershed remains a *de facto* border. That was the reason this route had remained out of bounds for Indians and foreigners alike, and we were one of the few parties to go across it.

Along the Shyok

The first day of the trek was a disaster. The first few crossings were difficult and our group was divided and stranded. The horses like their

typical Ladakhi owners would always go ahead and not look back, for they had to reach the campsite at Chong Jungle (3690 m) (also known as Horup). As we had started late, no one could reach the camp and people had to spend the night en route. A tired and haggard party arrived into the camp early morning for breakfast. Half a day of rest was declared and then we made a short journey to Burma (3760 m). The first crossing was that of the Chang Chenmo river. The Chang Chenmo (Ororotse) gorge flows in from the east and it is one of the deep valleys leading from the Shyok valley to the Aksai Chin plateau. There was a prominent track traversing the Chang Chenmo and crossing Lanak la (5486 m) to reach Kun Lun plains and Western Tibet plateau. This was an old trade route used by traders from the Tibet.

We came across a maidan with stones and offerings with prayer flags. This signified that we were in the presence of Thangsing Karmo, a place of worship for Ladakhis. A huge stone to east of the Shyok, appeared as if doing a *namaste*. The Buddhists worship here, especially on the full moon of the lunar ninth month when people gather in large numbers. This falls generally in the October and November months when the water level is low. As we looked back from the trail, this rock dominated the skyline.

Staying at Burma (3760 m) for the night and now getting accustomed to cold crossings we set off very early the next day. Our aim was to reach Chumed and Char Bagh. We were assured that after Chumed, crossings would be easier and the water level would be low. True to this assurance, after the third day, at Char Bagh (3920 m), the water level was low. But the final crossing at Char Bagh was a terror in itself. Our Kumauni porters, who were not used to crossing deep rivers, were stuck on the wrong bank. The entire party and the horses, unmindful of the resistance, went across and camped. After a while we saw this group sitting on the opposite bank and not willing to come across. All we could do was keep on shouting, plodding and encouraging them. When everything failed, our energetic Ladakhi member Motup Chewang climbed up a rock and started throwing stones at them, as if trying to push horses into water. After a lot of 'persuasion' they gathered courage, held hands and with terror written on their faces, came across the river, hoping that this was for the last time. One of them remarked, 'What sins I have done in past life to be crossing the Shyok so many times, never again', and that was the thought reflected by almost everyone.

A day ahead of Char Bagh we camped at foot of the Yurgolak fort (4050 m), which was located on a ridge about 100 m above. Though

the fort walls were in a dilapidated state whatever remained was still solid and one could see the rooms and the courtyards. From the fort, looking across the Shyok valley, was the North Shukpa Kunchang nala, locally known as Nortot. By traversing this glacier and crossing an easy pass, a trail crossed to Sumur in the Nubra valley. This was the old route used by the traders from Karakoram Pass to the Nubra valley when Saser la was closed. The reason for building this fort was not exactly known, but according to one legend it was built to protect against the invasion of Gen. Chengiz Khan of Mongolia, known in Ladakh 'Tsogpo Galden Chhang'. Another fort was built at Sumur by the Ladakhi king to offer complete security. About 300 years before the Mongolian army had invaded Ladakh. This fort is known as Tsogmak (Tsog-Mongolian, mak-troops). Their army conquered territories till Leh where one of their senior generals was killed. He was buried under 'Namgyal Tsemo' the *semo* on a hill above Leh. However much of this history may be debatable and unknown, but certainly the forts are worth preserving as one of the landmarks of the past.²

Next day on our way to Thangnyer (4130 m) (Thang-'plain', nyer-'in middle of', 'a camp in middle of plains') we were to pass some historical places. The first was Mandalthang on the western shores, gateway to North Shukpa Kunchang glacier (also known as Norot glacier). Traversing this glacier, teams had climbed Saser Kangri peaks, as was done during its first ascent in 1973. After their ascent, rising waters of the Shyok, which proved impossible to cross down stream, trapped the team. Hence they had to go northwards undertaking several dangerous crossings to return via Saser la. Fording the Shyok river is a major problem for attempting any of the peaks in this area.

To our east rose Kugrung group of peaks (6568 m, 6556 m and 6541 m were the highest of this group). These peaks were prominent and formidable. To the east it drained into the Kugrung river which flowed to the Chang Chenmo at Tsongtsalu Hot Springs (north of Phobrang). Peaks such as these suggest the wealth of mountain peaks and opportunities available when it will become possible to approach these areas.

The Galwan River

Soon we were standing at the mouth of the Galwan nala, which has a long history — a historic beginning and disastrous end. This is the nala named after Rasool Galwan, one of the great native explorers.

² We requested the Indian army to care of many monuments in this area and they have started recording and preserving them.

Gulam Rasool Galwan was among the pony-men taken on by Lord Dunmore to Pamirs in 1890. He served a host of other explorers and travellers; Younghusband, Longstaff, Phelps, Church, Wellby and Littledale – particularly on the route along the Shyok. In 1914 he was appointed as the caravan leader (a very prestigious post) of the big Italian scientific expedition of Filippo de Filippi, which explored the Rimo glacier systems and spent several months in the area.³

His claim to fame came from an earlier expedition with the British Joint Commissioner in 1899. He was part of the team, which reconnoitred possible routes through the Chang Chenmo valley going east from the Shyok river. With the Sahibs, he explored a large unknown river valley little to the north of the Chang Chenmo and this valley now bears his name, 'the Galwan valley'. This is a rare instance of a major geographical feature being given the name of a native explorer who put it on a western map. Apart from the Pundit explorers the native explorers have received far less recognition in the survey of the higher ranges. The native travellers certainly knew most of the routes before these were incorporated in 'western maps'.

Rasool Galwan finished his career as an Aksakal of Leh, a title for a rich and powerful contractor. Galwan had picked up English from his associations with the Sahibs. Encouraged by one of his employers, an American called Robert Barrett, he wrote his autobiography, *Servants of Sahibs*⁴. The book gives a lively insight to life on the caravan, towns and areas during those days and about the explorers and their habits.

Looking to this valley with sharp eyes or through binoculars one could see remains of an army post, built about 40 years before. Three valleys joined the Galwan nala at this point. Those who have read books on the 1962 Indo-China war, would find this familiar. It was in this valley in pursuance of the 'forward policy' followed by the Indian government, that the Indian army had built up a post at an almost indefensible spot.⁵ This post was surrounded by the Chinese troops since it was established in July 1962. It was one of first casualty of the

³ Rasool Galwan was an 'Arghon'. For full details refer to H. J. Vol. 58, p. 99-100, 'In the Land of Argans', by Harish Kapadia.

⁴ *Servant of Sahibs*, by Gulwan Rasool, written with the help of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Barrett. (Heffer, Cambridge, 1923, reprinted in 1989).

⁵ In 1960 Government of India, as policy, ordered the army to establish posts as near to the border as possible to physically occupy land. This was irrespective of its strategic value or possibilities of defending it. This policy led to disasters.

1962 war which was triggered on 20 October, when the post was overwhelmed, many were killed, injured and captured. The Galwan valley was one of the routes of attack by the Chinese troops.

The Shyok valley from now on was wide and to avoid some river crossings we went across a small pass 'Kalkatra la' (4400 m). Route to Kataklik (4240 m) was a gentle and simple walk and the camp was at a beautiful spot on the eastern bank. The nala led eastwards to a peak of 6917 m, 'Kataklik Kangri'. The peaks and groups that we were now to observe were completely unknown, never been attempted or explored. Next day after a short walk we camped at Sultan Chushku (4330 m) (Sultan-king, chushku-stream, 'stream of kings') where the Shyok took a sharp turn to the west. On the opposite bank in the west was the Sultan Chusku group, with more than four peaks rising above 6700 m. The Sultan Chusku nala and the Murgo nala met at this camping ground and we were only 5 kilometres away from the Chinese *de facto* border. This was the reason why the area was well protected and restricted.

From here we left the Shyok river and followed the Murgo nala from Sultan Chusku stream. We crossed the Jeong nala flowing from the Aksai Chin plains in the east. The Murgo nala had to be crossed, not less than at least 20 times before we could reach the open plains leading to the Murgo camp (4650 m). The line of control is not more than 15 km and hence there is a permanent army camp here, the first one we came across on this trail.

To stay for night we went off to Chhongtash 6 km to the west in an army truck. Chhongtash is a vast plain with a big stone in centre and that is what the name implies. (Chhong-big, tash-stone). A board at the helipad indicated altitude sensibly, 'You are 15,800 ft nearer to God'! Now that we had joined the summer trade route, from Karakoram Pass to Sasoma (across Saser la) the trail being used was well built. At least 3 of us had travelled on this trail before. On 26 May we passed Murgo, Kalon Chumik, to reach Burtsa (4600 m). Next day passing Kazi langar (4950 m) we climbed to Depsang la (5415 m) where our walk and horse rides ended. Indian army personnel were waiting for us with welcoming handshakes, tea and trucks. Depsang la is a vast plain and stretches almost 20 by 20 km, controlled in the east by the Chinese. This historic plain had seen hundreds of caravans pass by and in 1962, had seen attacks by Chinese aggressors.⁶

⁶ For photos and details of Depsang la area refer to H.J. Vol. 57, p. 111, 'The high altitude golf courses!', by Harish Kapadia.

The Karakoram Pass

We spent the night at Daulat Beg Oldi (5180 m) the famous ground known simply as DBO. Next day on the way up to Karakoram Pass we halted at Polu shelters, where two mud huts signified the place where many Yarkandi traders had taken shelter during bad weather. At this Polu, one of the explorers, Dr. P. H. C. Visser, left a small tablet stating 'Visser 1935' which is enshrined here. Next to it we erected another tablet in memory of our friend Kaivan Mistry with an inscription;

In memory of a mountaineer

KAIVAN MISTRY

of Bombay

(1968 – 2000)

Who died at Gapshan

Like Dew on the Mountain,

Like Foam on the River,

Like a Bubble on the Fountain,

Thou Are Gone and Forever!

Kaivan Mistry, an explorer and mountaineering friend, had died in the Shyok river on 27 August 2000 on the Indo-French expedition. It was an innocuous accident where four of us fell into the Shyok, while we three survived, he unfortunately, with his heavy rucksack fell on his back, and it appears his head hit a rock and died instantly. His body flowed down more than 3 km into the Shyok. When we think of the several crossings that we had done on this trail, this accident sounds tragic and fateful end of a budding mountaineer and a wonderful person. We do miss him.

Soon we reached Karakoram Pass,⁷ a historic day for us, 28 May

⁷ Karakoram Pass (5569 m)

The Karakoram Pass or KKP, as it is known in Indian Army slang, is perhaps the best known historic pass. Though situated on the eastern most point of the range, the entire range of mountains from the borders of Afghanistan till Aksai Chin is known as the Karakoram Range. It is named after 'black gravel' found here.

KKP is the pass on the famous Central Asia Trade Route, which linked India (Kashmir-Leh) in South Asia with Central Asia (Yarkand-Kashgar). No records are available about who pioneered the route across KKP. KKP had been crossed since 1794. After the 1962 Indo-China war visitors to KKP were banned. It was only in 1997 that two civilian parties visited the pass and we were the third to reach the pass in 2000. KKP, windswept, isolated and featureless stands as a monument to the historic events and caravans that crossed it.

2002, the first foreign expedition stood on this international border with China. The Karakoram pass had almost no view because both sides are blocked by small but long mountain ranges. There was a bone structure lined with prayer flags and of course, the flag of India.

About a km away on the same ridge of Karakoram Pass in the west, is Kadpa Ngonpo la, an alternative pass to Yarkand. This was also a well-known pass and several caravans followed it specially as *burtsa* fuel was available in plenty *en route*. Alexander Gardner, in one of his many journeys in the service of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, had crossed it in 1830. Kadpa Ngonpo pass is beyond the line of control between India and China. The Karakoram Pass would descend to Wahab Jilga and lead to Yarkand along the vast plains, while the route from Kadpa Nangpo la descended to the Yarkand valley and led along the Yarkand river directly.

On Karakoram Pass we recalled Andrew Dalgleish⁸ (who like I said earlier was murdered) Towards north of the Karakoram Pass, which is the Chinese territory, there was a huge camping ground. It was here that Andrew Dalgleish was murdered at night by Dawood Khan one of his companions. Dawood Khan was arrested in Yarkand and hanged, but nobody knew where the remains of Andrew Dalgleish lay. The remains finally, before his bones mixed up with the many bones lying around the pass, were carried to Leh and he was finally buried near the grave of Stolickzka in the Christian graveyard. We looked around for any signs of his grave. On this vast maidan a small mound of stones was the only noticeable feature. For some of us this was the second visit to the Karakoram Pass while our friends were the first Japanese reaching this pass after 93 years.

Crossing Col Italia

Finally on 30 May our caravan of 55 mules deposited us at base camp 1 (4850 m), seven km west of Gapshan and at foot of the Central Rimo glacier. We sorted food and gear and started ferries on the Central Rimo glacier to establish our further camps. It was going to be hard work from now on. More than 2000 kg of luggage was to be borne on the shoulders of members and available porters. From 1 June we started establishing various camps along the Central Rimo glacier and proceeding on the moraines on the right, now snowbound. Some of us had trekked on this route in the year 2000 but the terrain looked completely different now with the cover of

⁸ *Ibid.* H.J. Vol. 57, p. 113.



Article 13

(Huzefa Electricwala)

26. Indo-Japanese team at Karakoram Pass.



Article 13

(Harish Kapadia)

27. Camp at Col Italia. Rimo III (right) and IV in background.



Article 13

(Huzefa Electricwala)

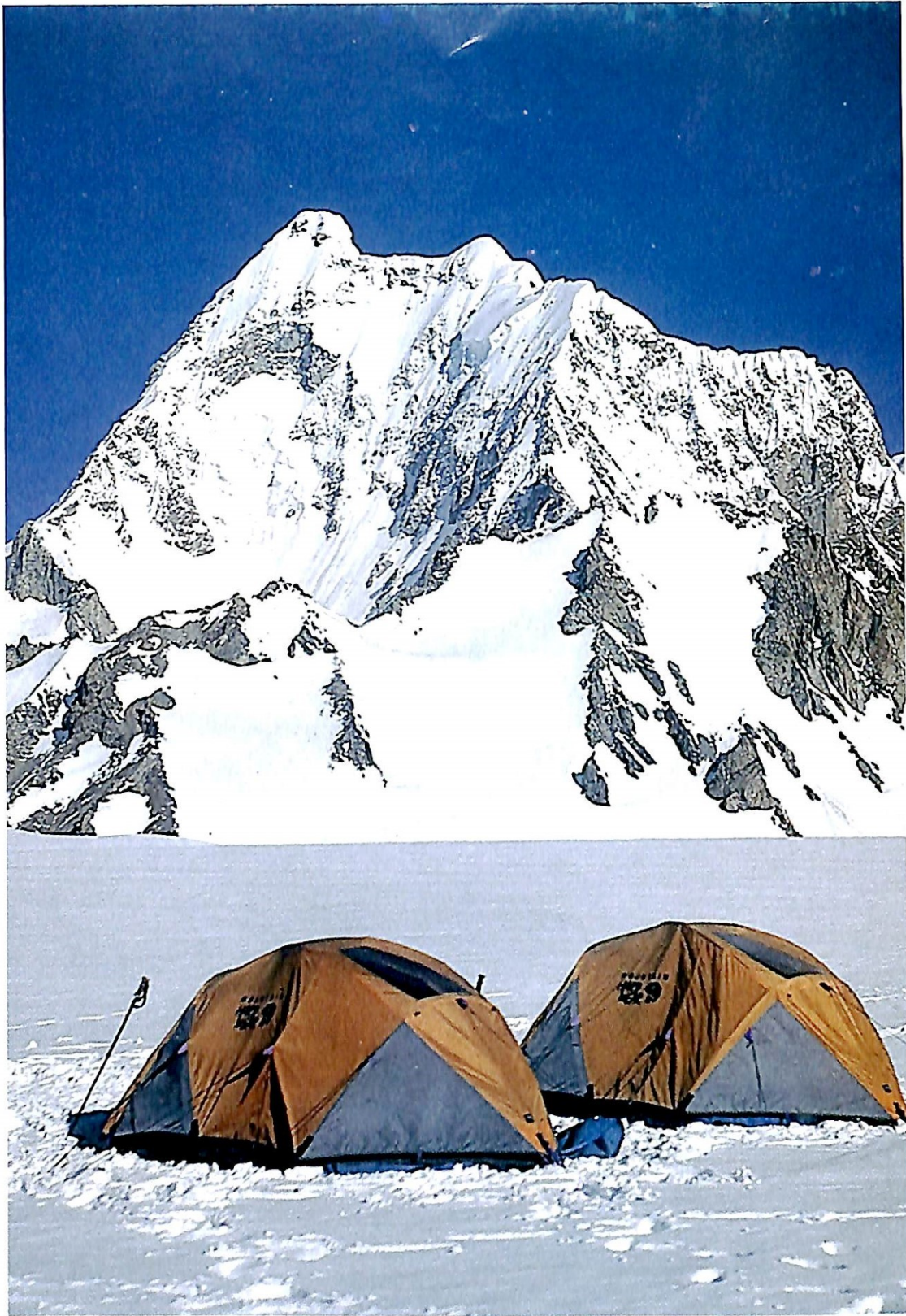
28. En route to Karakoram pass. Pass is located to right of the hill seen in background.



Article 13

(Harish Kapadia)

29. 'Polu shelters' with memorial stones to Visser Expedition 1935 and Kaivan Mistry.



Article 13

(Harish Kapadia)

30. Padmanabh peak from camp on the Teram Shehr plateau. Summit was climbed by the left hand ridge.

snow. Ferrying parties left at 2 a.m. to deposit luggage at the camp ahead and returned back to camp before the snow was soft. The build up was slow but steady and we could look around to wonderful views.

We passed near the snout of the North Rimo glacier, which is one of the quietest international boundaries in the Karakoram. From here one can cross the Shaksgam pass, (to the Shaksgam valley) which was seen in the distance. Many caravans had passed through here too. Turning west and going towards head of the Central Rimo glacier, route was snow covered but luckily devoid of too many crevasses. We established our Camp IV (5750 m) about 3 km before Col Italia.⁹

This pass, at the head of Central Rimo glacier, crosses to Teram Shehr glacier, which descends to the Siachen glacier, thus linking the Shyok and the Nubra valleys. A kilometre to north of Col Italia, there were many ridges and depressions, which were overlooking the Shaksgam valley and mountains of Shaksgam were clearly seen. Towards the south rose the Rimo peaks, which we were familiar with, our past expeditions having climbed or attempted at least three of them.

In 1930 Prof Giotto Dainelli, who had been the geographer on the 1913-14 expedition of Filippo de Filippi to the Rimo glaciers, had entered the Siachen glacier in June, before the Nubra rose sufficiently to stop him. He spent two months on the glacier, establishing his base at the junction of the Teram Shehr glacier. Later the passage through the Nubra valley was blocked due to floods and he decided to return over a 6000 m pass to the Rimo glacier system, which he knew well, to join the main Karakoram route. He named this 'Col Italia', dedicated to Italian explorers.¹⁰

This was the only recorded crossing of the pass (5920 m) and in 2000, after 70 years, with Huzefa Electricwala and Kaivan Mistry, I had stood here. Now, our entire team stayed here and it was 72 years since the first crossing that our party descended towards the west. Col Italia is almost a 7 by 7 km vast plateau where someone could get lost (as our porters did in bad weather while ferrying luggage). We descended to the foot of a giant peak of 7030 m which

⁹ Full description of this route and photos are available in H.J. Vol. 57, p.118, 'The high altitude golf courses!' by Harish Kapadia.

¹⁰ Refer to H.J. Vol.4, p. 46, 'My expedition in the eastern Karakoram 1930', by G. Dainelli.

we had named Padmanabh and established our base camp 2 (5650 m) at its foot.¹¹

From the base camp 2 we had two projects in hand. One was the ascent of Padmanabh. A team of climbers led by Hiroshi Sakai, the climbing leader, prepared for the ascent.¹² Ryuji Hayashibara and myself were to explore the Teram Shehr Plateau.

Exploration of Teram Shehr Plateau

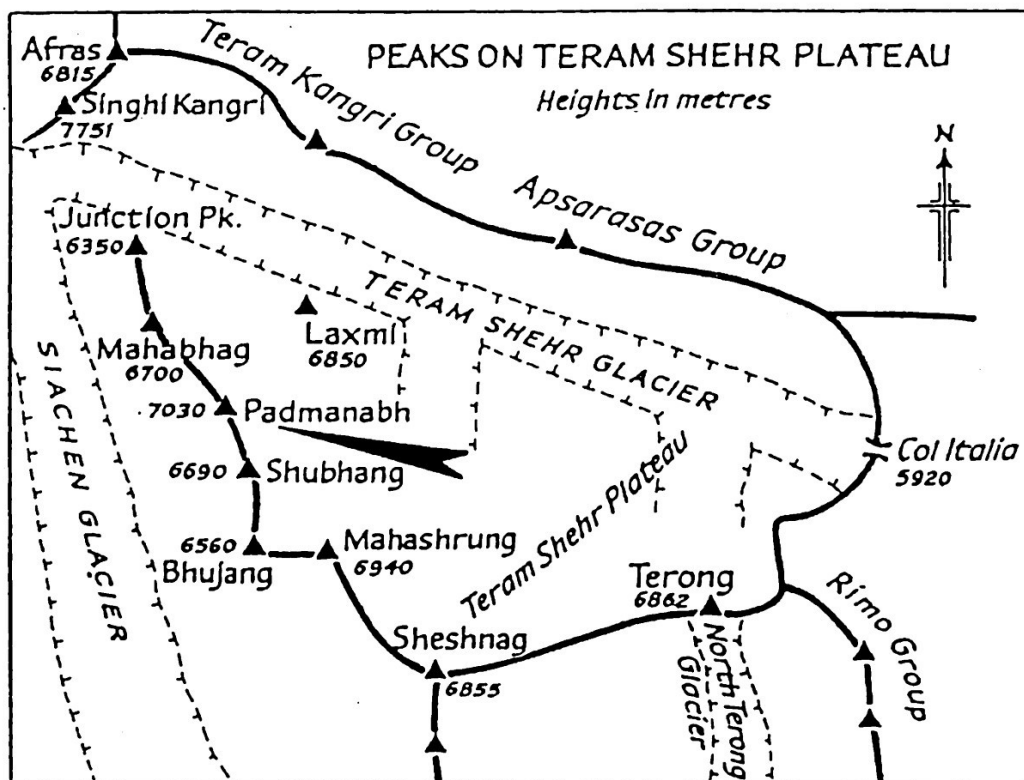
We owe the first views of this great plateau to Stephen Venables. While attempting Rimo I in 1985, he observed it. His pictures of this plateau, more than around 10 sq. km, with the peaks of the Siachen glacier and K2 in background looked inviting.¹³ This plateau is one of the unique features of the Siachen, East Karakoram or possibly anywhere in the world. It is amazing that such a huge high plateau exists at 6200 m, surrounded by several peaks, many of them rising up to 6500 m (but only 300 m above the plateau!). From the gaps and cols between these peaks one could look down to the Siachen Glacier. I had noted this plateau in 1985 for a future trip, it remained unvisited until today and finally after 17 years I was renewing my affair with it.

On 21 June, Lingen (Ryuji Hayashibara) 3 porters and myself formed an independent party and left for 5 days of exploration of the Teram Shehr Plateau. It was not technically difficult, but we were conscious that we were going over huge and deep crevasses. We covered ground slowly about 4-8 kms per day, established two camps to reach the head of the plateau. We reached a high col between Mahashrung (6940) and Sheshnag (6855 m) peaks to look to the Siachen glacier and across to the Karakoram peaks. We walked around the plateau to different cols and observed peaks familiar through photographs, with Rimo I (7385 m) dominating the view in the south. The best views were towards the north where the wall of the Apsarasas peaks (I (7245 m), II (7239 m), III (7236 m), IV (7140 m) were seen to a great advantage. Only Apsarasas I

¹¹ Most names to peaks and passes in this area were given in 1911-12 by Grant Peterkin, a surveyor with the Workman expedition. The only peak named (by Bullock Workman, in 1912) on the Teram Shehr Plateau was Laxmi (6850 m), wife of Vishnu and goddess of wealth. For peak 7030 m we proposed the name Padmanabh (literally, 'the one who is born from the navel') a name of Lord Vishnu, the preserver of the Universe. Other peaks surrounding the plateau were given various names of Vishnu. It is hoped that he will protect the area and prevent further destruction.

¹² See Article 14 'First ascent of Padmanabh', by Hiroshi Sakai, in this volume.

¹³ See H.J. Vol. 42, photo opp. page 88. Later Yoshio Ogata and Doug Scott published similar photos from higher camps on the Rimo peaks.



has been climbed. To the northwest peaks of the Teram Kangri group I (7495 m), II (7407 m), III (7382 m) were visible. It was an historical moment for us to stand on this high plateau and look around this vast vista of peaks. For my companion Lingen it was the fulfillment of a dream. He had visited the Siachen glacier with Japanese expeditions in the 1970s and 1980s when teams approached it from the west, Pakistan. Now he had seen it from the east and India.

We returned back to base camp 2 satisfied. We could see climbers on the peak Padmanabh. On 25 June Hiroshi Sakai and Yasushi Tanahashi climbed Padmanabh (7030 m). It was a difficult climb, according to them, as they found some sections on this climb more difficult than the ascent of Nanga Parbat, which both had achieved. There was jubilation, happiness and plenty of camaraderie as we shared Indian and Japanese food and celebrated.

The Siachen Glacier

On the 27th we wound up our camp and proceeded to descend to the Siachen glacier. Crevasses at the edge of the Teram Shehr glacier were deep, open and scary but once we reached the lower moraine, it was a long and tiring walk. Finally we reached a vast open meadow and surprised to see flowers and droppings of ibex. We camped near a huge lake, which the army had named 'Forward Logistic Base' (FLB), and were warmly welcomed by the army. This was the area where Bullock-

Workman and Prof. Dainelli teams had camped. It offered wonderful views of the vast, long Siachen glacier running from south to north and across rose the peaks dominated by K12 (7428 m) Salto Kangri I and II, (7742 m) and (7705 m) and others. We spent a rest day witnessing with amazement and pride how the army defended the glacier throughout the year. Their supplies came through several helicopters landings - a remarkable site at this altitude.

We looked around for any signs of camps of earlier explorers. To the south of the camp were vast open meadows from where Junction Peak (6250 m) rises. Workman expedition, which explored the area in 1911 and 1912, had written about seeing remains of a Yarkandi village at this grassy meadow. We saw huge rocks in the middle of the meadow with small stones lying around in a circle. In typical Yarkandi or Balti style a huge pole may have been erected on the stone and a cloth spread all over four sides to make a Yurt, like Changpas of Rupshu.¹⁴ Behind this meadow rose a lovely peak of 6250 m, which was climbed by the Workman couple in 1911 and named 'Junction peak' for it stood at the junction of three valleys, the Teram Shehr, Siachen glacier and Bilafond glacier.¹⁵

Satisfied but tired we were now reaching the end of our journey. Over the next three days we stayed with the army and walked down well-used army trail on the Siachen glacier. At one of the intermediary camps the Camp Commander had received a wireless message 'to look for the Indo-Japanese team'.

I asked 'where could they emerge from?'

'From anywhere', was the laconic reply received.

'Hence we had sentry posted on all the four sides of the camp, who knows what you mountaineers do,' he added with a chuckle.

We reached the base camp of the Siachen glacier on 1 July. It was end of the journey for us as we bowed at the temple to the 'The God

¹⁴ In later part of the year, a stone with an inscription 'Spedizone Dainelli 1930' was discovered at this spot. They also found human remains and small constructions of a village. This being the only grassy spot, on the barren Siachen glacier, it is evident that the Yarkandis in the years gone by, Bullock Workman's expedition in 1911-12 and Prof Dainelli in 1930 had camped here. See Note 17, by Capt. Nitin Shreshtha in H.J. Vol. 59. Workman mentions leaving mark 'B.W.' on a 'solid rock' and someday this also may be found.

¹⁵ Later in the year 2002, Soldiers of 7 / 11 Gorkha Rifles, stationed at this camp ascended it.



Article 13

(Huzefa Electricwala)

33. The Depsang plateau from Depsng la. Kun Lun peaks in distance.

that did not fail'.¹⁶ In this journey we had travelled a formidable terrain for 460 km, crossed 5 passes and climbed a peak of 7030 m, our first ascent of Padmanabh. What more did one want, than see this as the blessings of God.

At the base camp as we relaxed we requested for an army barber to give us a haircut after many days of travelling. Next morning a gentleman appeared in climbing harness, fully dressed with snow shoes, and a rucksack with crampon and an ice axe. He announced himself to be the barber. We looked at him with amazement.

'I am the barber of the Gorkha Regiment and I also have to undergo mountaineering training to go up the glacier. As my training is about to begin, I am all ready and dressed up.'

So here we were sitting in front of a fully dressed mountaineer, giving us a haircut! After the haircut I asked him to give me a shave.

'I am not very good at shaving. Remember I am the barber of the Gorkha Regiment and as you know Gorkhas don't have beards', he informed me sheepishly.

The army gave us a party where many officers joined in the celebrations. As we had seen many helicopters flying and heard many stories about them, I asked the Commander of the Helicopter Regiment, an officer with a great sense of humour;

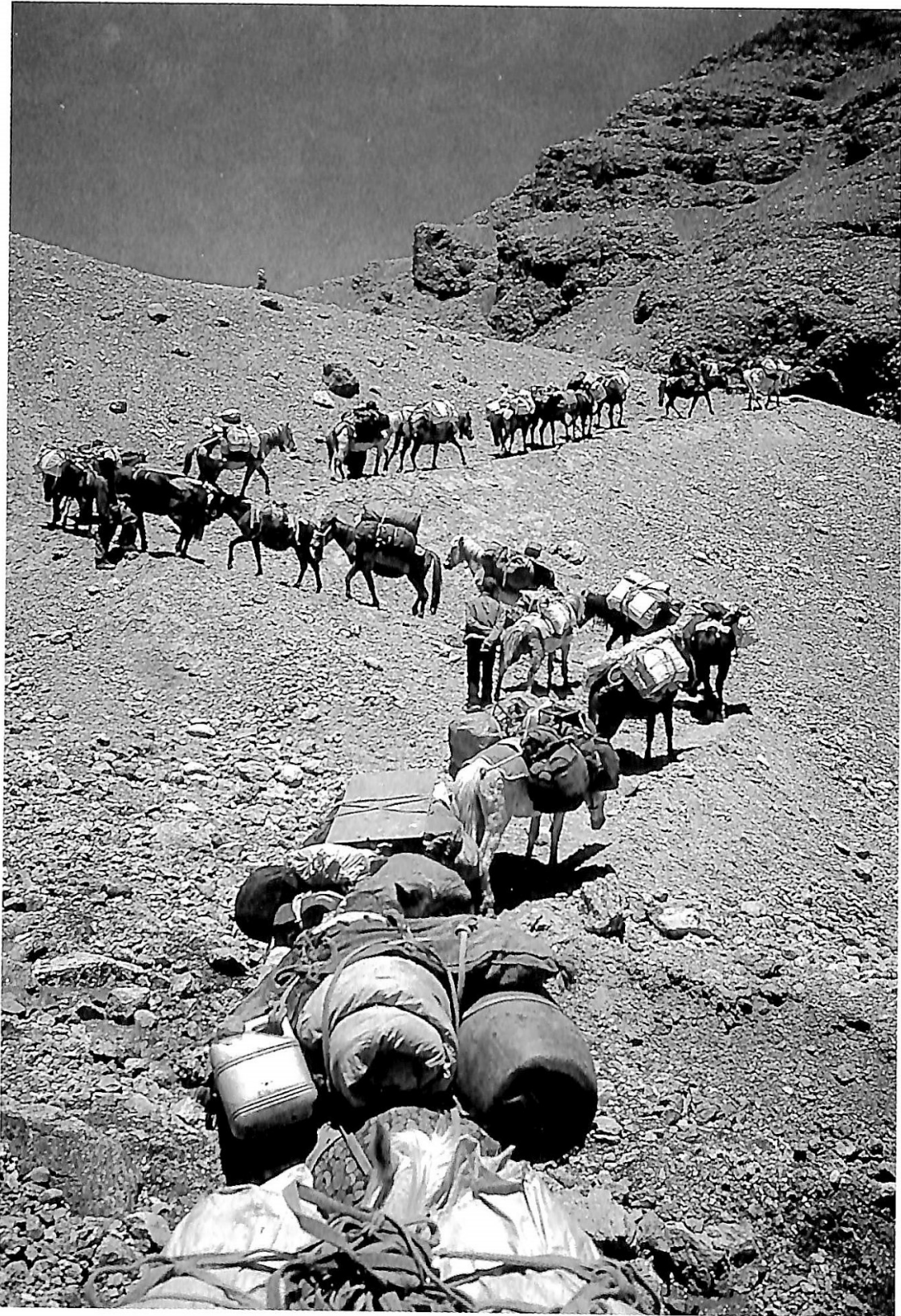
'I heard that you pilots whistle, sing songs and crisscross each other while flying, is it true?'

'Ya Ya and we dance also, didn't they tell you that. But the best is when we throw out a passenger!' he laughed. The final word was of course from them.

'Sir, we have heard that mountaineering is a mind over matter, but looking at what you guys have done across the Karakoram ranges and the passes, it is evident that you have no mind'.

Well there was no denying that. We were back to square one; from *Lamberdars* to Air Force officers, all declared mountaineers mad!

¹⁶ See *The God That failed*, by Arthur Koestler and others (Hamish Hamilton, London,1950). The book was a study on communism. Their vision of God and the reality of the communist state reached a breaking point and their beliefs failed. We were a group of people from a variety of religious beliefs: Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Shinto, Zoroastrian and Christian. Perhaps we were protected by all faiths and our mountain God did not fail us.



Article 16

(Harish Kapadia)

34. Mules – Kings of Karakoram, marching on!

SUMMARY

The Indo-Japanese East Karakoram Expedition traversed the Shyok valley from Shyok village to Karakoram Pass along the winter trade route and descended via the Siachen snout along the Nubra valley.

Peaks Climbed			Summiteers
1	Padmanabh	7030 m 25 th June 2002	Hiroshi Sakai and Yasushi Tanahashi (1 st ascent)

Passes - Crossed – Reached (by all members)			
1	Chang la	5335 m	15 th May 2002
2	Kalkatra la	4400 m	20 th May 2002
3	Depsang la	5415 m	27 th May 2002
4	Karakoram Pass	5569 m	28 th May 2002
5	Col Italia	5920 m	15 th June 2002

Explorations			
1.	Teram Shehr Plateau	5650 to 6250 m 16 km	to 21 st to 24 th June 2002 Harish Kapadia and Ryuji Hayashibara

- Glaciers Traversed (by all members)
- 1 Central Rimo glacier from snout till its head.
 - 2 Teram Shehr glacier from its head to the snout.
 - 3 Siachen glacier from junction with Teram Shehr glacier to its snout.

Team:

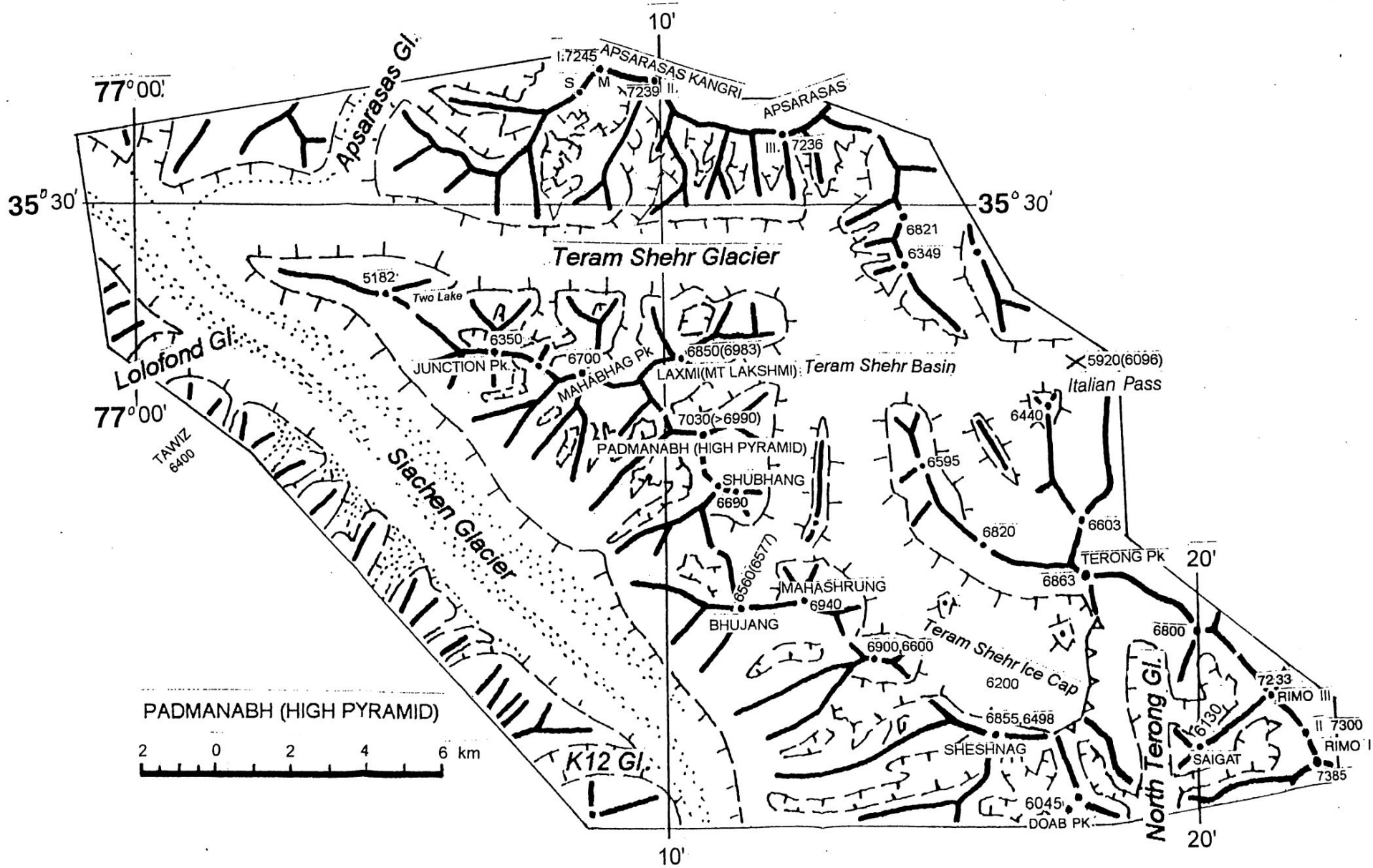
(Indian) Harish Kapadia (leader), Motup Chewang, Huzefa Electricwala, Lt. Commander S. Dam and Rushad Nanavatty.

(Japanese) Hiroshi Sakai (deputy leader), Yasushi Tanahashi, Dr. Hirofumi Oe, Tadashi Fukuwada and Ryuji Hayashibara.

A liaison officer from the Indian army, Capt. Madhab Boro, 3 Ladakh Scouts, 102 Infantry Brigade, accompanied the team.

Period: 8th May to 9th July 2002.

Organised by: Japanese Alpine Club, Tokyo, Japan and The Mountaineers Bombay, India.



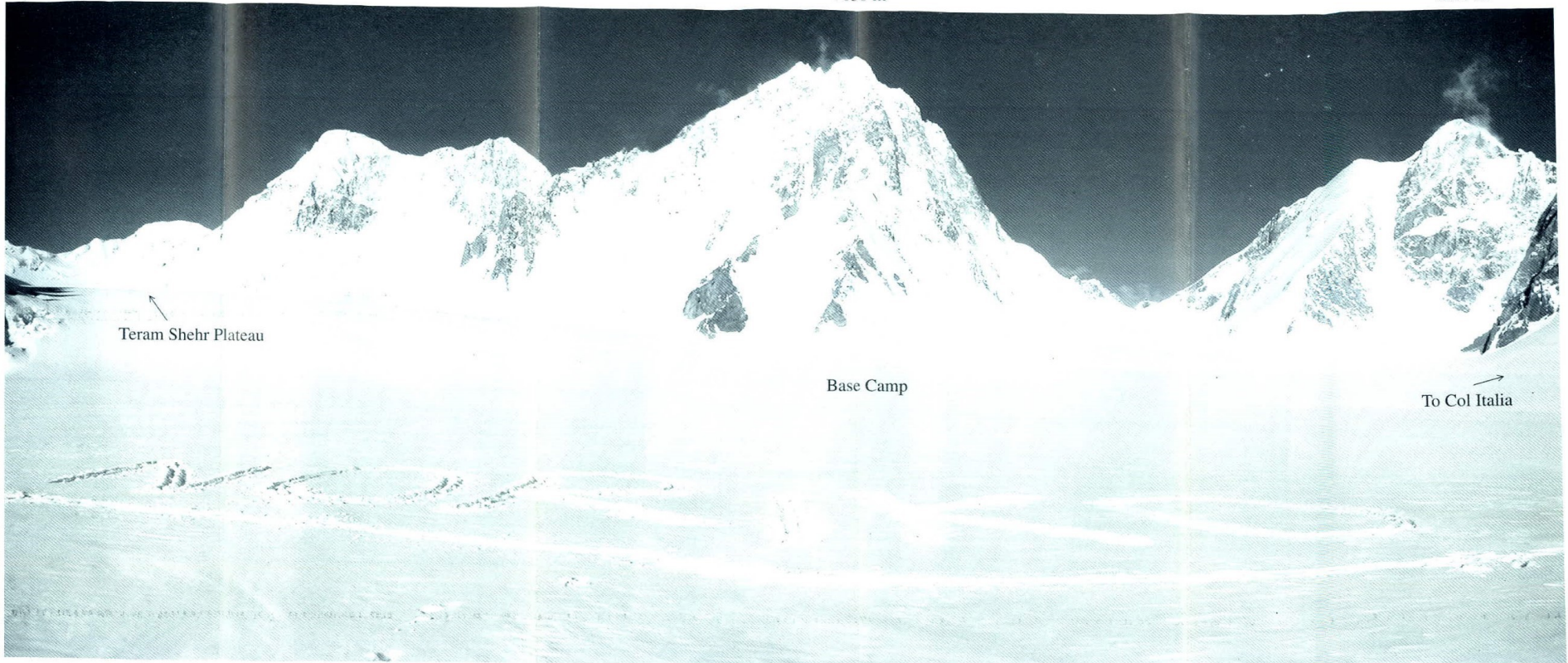
59
112-113

Bhujang
6560 m

Shubhang
6690 m

Padmanabh
7030 m

Laxmi
6850 m



ARTICLE 14

PANORAMA D : Padmanabh group of peaks, from Teram Shehr Plateau, East Karakoram.

(Hiroshi Sakai)

Padmanabh
7030 m

Laxmi
6850 m

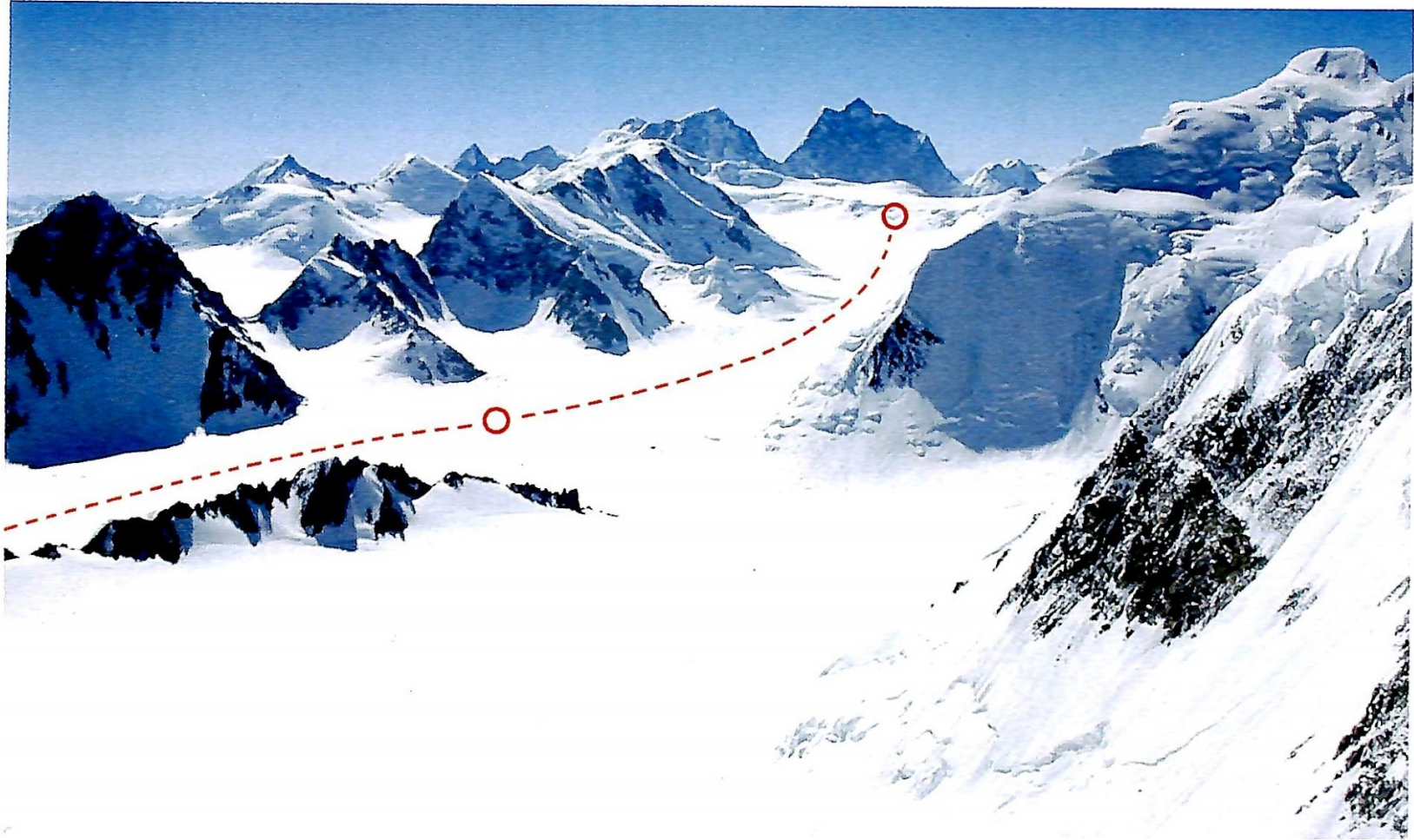
Teram Kangri
Group

Apsarasas
Group



ARTICLE 13 PANORAMA C : View from Teram Shehr Plateau, looking north: Padmanabh, Teram Kangri and Apsarasas groups, East Karakoram.

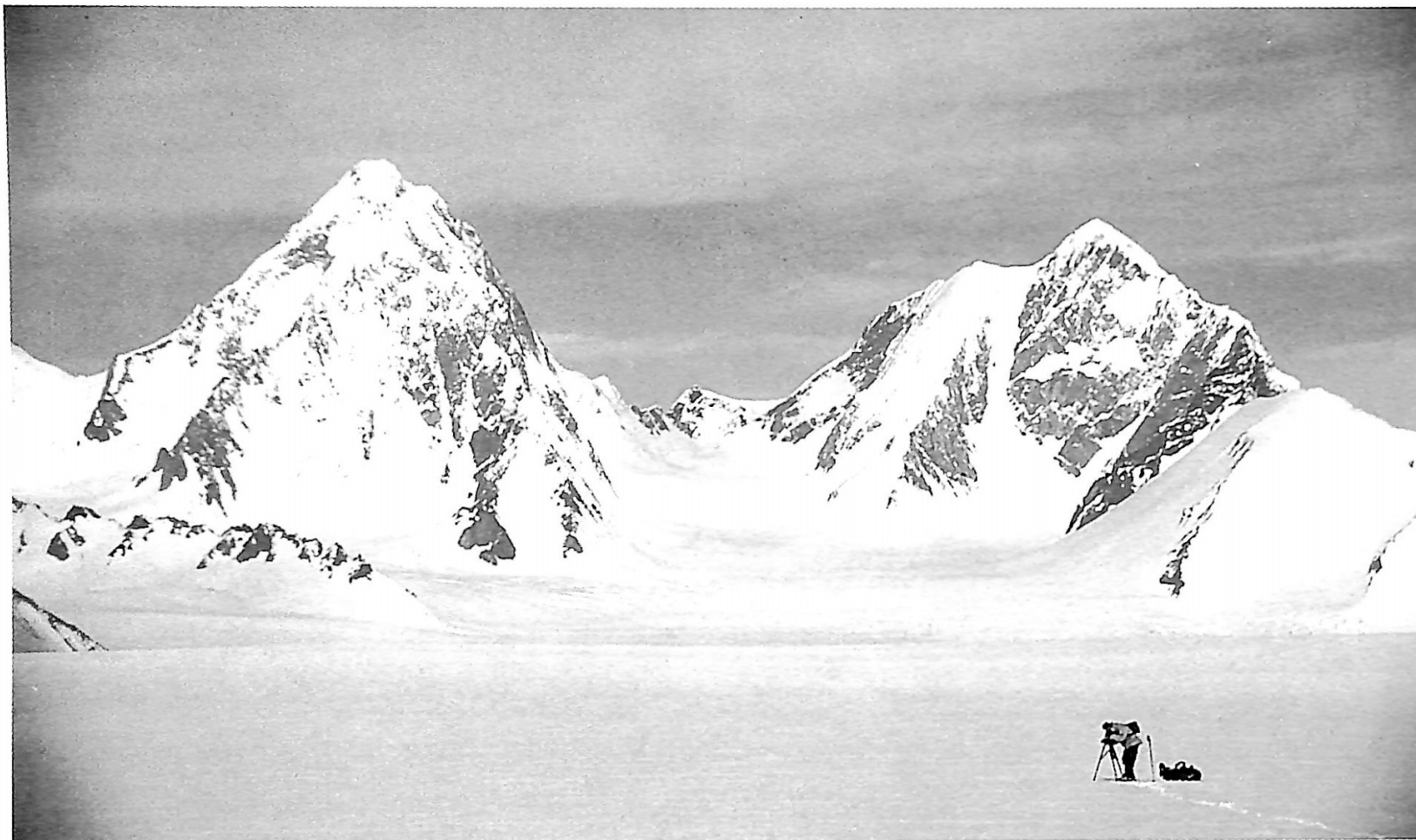
(Harish Kapadia)



Article 13

(H. Sakai)

32. Teram Shehr Plateau. Route of first exploration.



Article 13

(S. Dam)

31. Padmanabh and Laxmi (right) peaks seen from plateau below Col Italia.