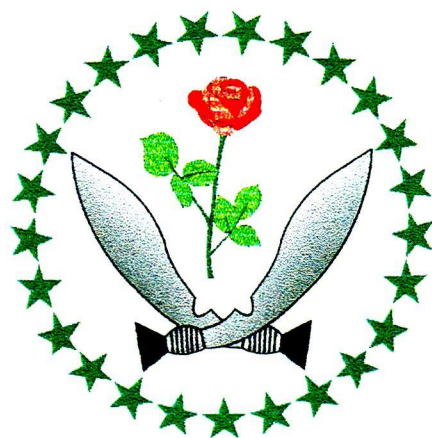


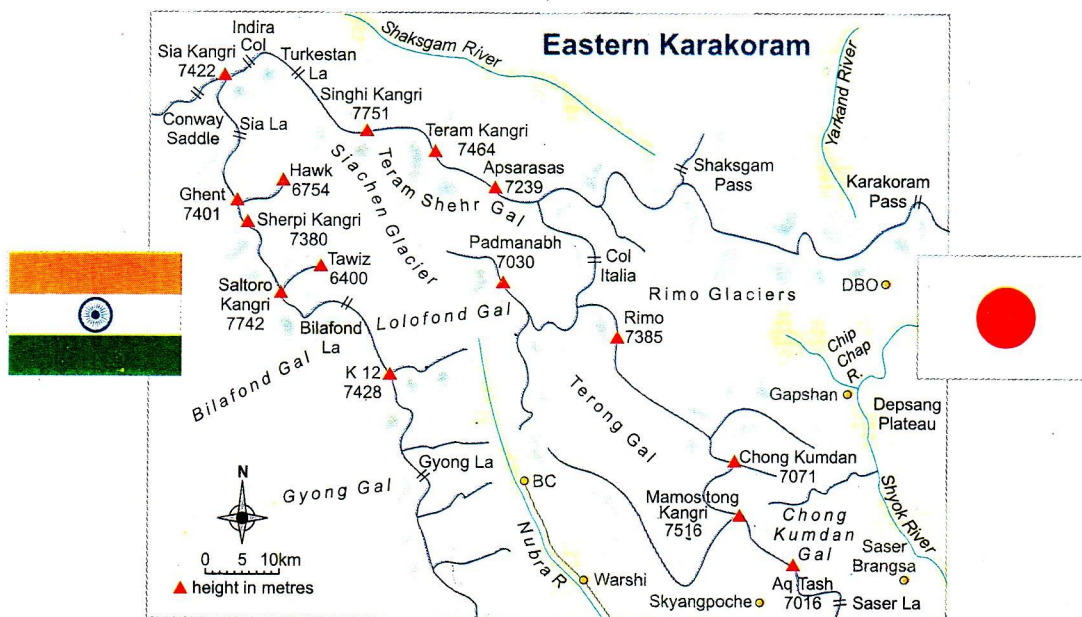
# THE INDIA – JAPAN EAST KARAKORAM EXPEDITION 2002

|| J E K E 2002

**Report**



# The Indian Japanese East Karakoram Expedition-2002



*Dedicated to memory of a brave soldier of the Indian army.  
He loved the Himalaya and gave his life defending it.*

**Lt. Nawang Kapadia**

4/3 Gorkha Rifles



Lt. Nawang Kapadia  
(15 Dec 1975 - 11 Nov 2000)

IJEKE 2002

www.nawang.com

*Celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of  
the establishment of diplomatic relations  
between India and Japan.*

**HARISH KAPADIA**

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## BRIEF REPORT

The expedition consisting of 5 Indian and 5 Japanese mountaineers undertook a long traverse of the Eastern Karakoram valleys for two months and achieved a lot. The team covered almost 550 km (with various repeated load-ferries), carried almost 2500 kg of food, equipment and personal gear (first on 55 mules, later by personal ferries by 11 members and 15 Sherpas and porters) and lived continuously on snow for almost 35 days, braving rather cold temperatures. There were no injuries, accident and or sickness (except to one porter).

The team traversed a historic route in the Shyok valley and returned via the Nubra valley (the Siachen glacier). Five passes were reached or crossed, two large glaciers were fully traversed and a vast unknown ice plateau was explored. Above all, the first ascent of a virgin and difficult 7030 m high peak of Padmanabh was achieved.

1. The team traversed the Shyok river valley from the Shyok village (Tankse - Darbuk) to Karakoram Pass, along the ancient winter Trade route – the first expedition to achieve this in last five decades.
2. Historic Karakoram Pass, on the international border between Indian and China was reached. First time in history of independent India that a team involving foreign mountaineers was permitted to visit the Pass. (One sole British photographer had reached the pass in 1997). Japanese mountaineers were the first from their country to stand on the pass after 93 years.
3. The team traversed the entire Central Rimo Glacier and the Teram Shehr Glacier by crossing Col Italia, the high pass between the two glaciers. It was for the first time, since its first crossing in 1929, that this pass was crossed – after 73 years. (An Indian team consisting of almost same members had reached the pass in 2000, but had not crossed it).
4. The high and vast Teram Shehr Ice-Plateau was explored and various cols surrounding the Plateau were investigated. The Plateau is a unique feature in the Karakoram with ice and snow at height of about 6200 m, surrounded by high peaks on all sides. This was for the first time that anyone had reached the plateau (Harish Kapadia and Ryuji Hayashibara), seen so often in photos taken from peaks like Rimo.
5. The first ascent of peak Padmanabh (7030 m) was made on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2002 (Hiroshi Sakai and Yasushi Tanahashi) After setting up a second Base Camp (5650 m) at its foot another high summit camp was made at 6250 m near a col at foot of the south ridge. In next four days, 16 pitches of ropes were fixed till about 6750 m. Two teams consisting of Japanese and Indian mountaineers worked together to push the route. Finally a team of 2 Japanese and one Indian (Lt Cdr S. Dam) started for the summit. However Dam had to drop out of the final attempt soon. Two Japanese in a long push of almost 11 hours of continuous climbing reached the summit. Both had previously climbed Nanga Parbat but rated this peak more difficult in many aspects than that famous 'Killer mountain'. A team of Indians and Japanese (Motup Chewang, Rushad Nanavatty and Dr Oe (each of them had worked hard and reached high in preparing the final route) was poised to attempt the summit again in next two days but due to onset of bad weather for next few days plans had to be given up.  
This was the highest peak on the Teram Shehr Plateau and a major first ascent in the Siachen Glacier group after many years.
6. The team returned via the Siachen Glacier to the Nubra valley. This was the first international team to climb on this war-torn glacier since 1986. These were the first Japanese mountaineers to visit the glacier from the Indian side since the conflict on the

Siachen Glacier began in 1984 (many Japanese teams had climbed on the Siachen Glacier between 1972-1983, approaching it from the west).

Despite gathering war clouds between India and Pakistan while the expedition was on the mountains, the Indian army fully backed the team and at no point we were asked to stop or change route.

**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:** 8<sup>th</sup> May to 9<sup>th</sup> July 2002.

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

The expedition is grateful to the Indian Army for permission and support to undertake this venture. We are specially thankful to Lt. General R. K. Nanavatty, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, General Officer Commanding – in – Command, Northern Command, Indian Army, without whose strong support we would not have been able to climb in this area or complete the expedition under difficult situation that developed.

Full detailed report about the expedition will be available soon and hosted with many photographs on the website [www.nawang.com](http://www.nawang.com)

**HIROSHI SAKAI**  
(Climbing Leader)

Mumbai (India)  
11<sup>th</sup> July 2002

**HARISH KAPADIA**  
(Leader)



Lt. Nawang Kapadia  
(1975 – 2000)

Expedition dedicated to memory of:

**LT. NAWANG KAPADIA**

A brave soldier of the Indian Army who loved the Himalaya and gave his life defending it.

“The World is a fine place and worth fighting for” - Hemmingway

# THE INDIAN - JAPANESE EAST KARAKORAM EXPEDITION

## 2002

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### PADMANABH : GOD THAT DID NOT FAIL

#### Summary of Report

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## 1. Along the Shyok River to Karakoram Pass

The team gathered at Leh on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2002, spending next four days in acclimatising. We crossed Chang La (5335 m) to reach Tankse - Darbuk Valley and drove ahead to the Shyok village (3680 m). The village was the only inhabited place that we came across during two months of trek. It is located at the great bend of the Shyok river as it flows in from the southwest and taking a huge turn flows northwest.

The old winter trade route to Karakoram pass passed along the Shyok river. Along this route the Shyok river has to be crossed several times. Thus this route can be used only when water level in the river is low enough to do so and it is possible to go along this route from early November till early May depending on the weather. In next 7 days we trekked along the Shyok river and crossed it for 27 times (each crossing was a challenge as we had to wade through extreme cold, deep and fast flowing water, particularly in the lower reaches) holding hands and cross. The route and the crossings are traditionally known to the muleteers. The expedition baggage, weighing nearly 2500 kilos was carried by 55 mules. We were accompanied by 8 Kumauni, 4 Sherpa and 4 Ladakhi porters as permanent staff for the entire trip.

Starting on 17<sup>th</sup> of May, we passed Chong jungle (3690 m) to reach Murgo (4550 m) which is on the summer trail to Karakoram which comes across Saser La (full details of daily stages and heights are given at the end). En route we passed the gorges of Chang Chenmo river and the Galwan river in the east and feeding much water into the main Shyok river. Both these gorges are in the east and leads towards the Chinese border. The Galwan river valley witnessed much fighting during the 1962 invasion by the Chinese. The high mountain ridge to the east of this valley contains peaks like Kugrung (6568 m) and this watershed ridge forms the present de facto border between India and China. It was this proximity to the troubled border that had prohibited any trekkers or mountaineers to visit this area for several years. We were the first international team to travel the entire route to Karakoram Pass.

On the left bank of the Shyok river, the British had built a mule trail to keep this route open throughout the year for trade and to avoid the dangerous crossings of the Shyok. We could see traces of this trail at many places, sometimes hewn out of steep rock with dynamite. The trail is now not in use and cannot be traversed.

This trail is a tribute to Rasool Galwan, an Arghon. He was the caravan leader on an 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 its north 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. In 1962, the Chinese troops surrounded the Indian army post in this very Galwan valley and the first shots were fired here to start the Indo-China war.

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*. The book gives a lively insight to life on the caravan, the trail along the Shyok river, towns and areas during those days and about the explorers and their habits.

After Chhumed, on the third day, the trail became easier as water in the Shyok river now onwards was low and could be crossed easily. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of May we camped at Yurgolak little below an ancient fort which overlooked to the plains of Mandalthang. It is believed that a fort was built here to prevent Mongolian invaders, part of the army of Chengiz Khan invading lower Ladakh. The Shukpa Kunzang valley to the northwest of this fort leads to the Sumur



village in the Nubra valley, where another fort of similar nature exists. Between these two forts Ladakhis prevented Mongolian invasions.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> of May we camped at Sultan Chushku ('the spring of Sultan'). From here we left the main Shyok river which was flowing towards west and then north along the Chong Kundan to Gapshan. As per local advise, it is not possible for horses to use this route before October. We bifurcated along the Murgo nala and joined the summer trail at Murgo. Towards east, several high peaks between 6820 m to 6575 m were seen. These peaks of Kataklik Group would be some of the highest unclimbed peaks in the area.

From Murgo we proceeded along the summer trail to Karakoram Pass. This trail is spectacular but less difficult as it is regularly in use and many difficult passages have bridges or supports. We passed through Kalon Chumik, Kazi Langar and climbed up to Depsang La (5415 m). Here we were received by vehicles of the Indian Army and taken to Track Junction and DBO (Daulat Beg Oldi) for the night. It was an amazing sight looking at this vast plateau at about 5300 m and more so, driving vehicles on it.

28<sup>th</sup> of May, was an important day for us as we reached the historic Karakoram Pass (5570 m). Our friends were happy to reach the pass, the first Japanese after 93 years, and ours was the first international team permitted to stand on this pass, which is on the India-China border, after the Indian Independence (one British photographer, Paul Harris, had reached the pass in 1997 along with some Indian companions). We looked around the pass and took pictures before returning back. For three of us (Kapadia, Huzefa, Dam) this was the second visit to the Karakoram Pass as we had reached here in the year 2000. Motup Chewang was the third generation of Goba family to reach the pass: his grandfather had crossed it several times for trade and his father stood here many times as part of defence forces – a unique record!

On the way back we halted at the historic site of Polu where ancient mud shelters were discovered. These shelters were built by Yarkandis to take refuge in case of a storm or strong winds. Near these shelters a memorial stone with "Visser 1935" written on it exists as tribute to the early explorations by Dr Ph. C. Visser from the Netherlands. We built another memorial next to it, in same style, in memory of our friend Kaivan Mistry who had visited Karakoram Pass with us in the year 2000 but unfortunately died soon there after, when he fell into the Shyok river on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2000. It was a fitting addition to the history of this area.

From DBO we travelled to Gapshan and ahead to the Rimo glaciers. On 30<sup>th</sup> May we established Base Camp 1 (4850 m) next to the moraine of the Central Rimo Glacier. Horses left us and from here everything (almost 2000 kilos) was to be carried between members and the permanent staff.

## **II. Along the Central Rimo Glacier – Across Col Italia – and the descent of the Teram Shehr Glacier**

To cross the Shyok we had come little early in the season and hence now we faced intense cold on the higher reaches of the Karakoram glaciers. All further camps had to be established on snow and members and staff who were to ferry the loads, started around 3 a.m. and returned back after long and tiring ferries by noon to avoid soft snow. We built three camps to reach the foot of Col Italia. We could traverse on the moraine of the Central Rimo Glacier halfway up and beyond that we moved onto snow. We passed near the snout of the North Rimo Glacier, the junction between the two glaciers forming the international boundary between India and China. Camp 4 was set up little before Col Italia at 5750 m. Finally on 15<sup>th</sup> June, 16 days after we started operating from Base Camp 1, Col Italia, 5920 m, was crossed and we descended the Teram Shehr Glacier in the west. Base Camp 2 (5650 m) was established at foot of the peak Padmanabh. These were the hardest two weeks for the expedition members, as despite inclement weather and soft snow, members, and particularly the staff, carried heavy loads to set up the expedition at foot of our chosen peak.



The Central Rimo Glacier and Col Italia had only a brief history of visitors. Filippo de Filippi, an Italian, explored the Rimo Glaciers in 1913 and studied the area for its geology. With him was young Professor G. Dainelli. Dainelli visited the Siachen Glacier in 1929. While he was on the glacier, the Nubra river was in floods and his retreat down the Siachen Glacier was cut off. With his knowledge of the earlier expedition with Filippi, he climbed up the Teram Shehr Glacier and crossed a high col down the Central Rimo Glacier with almost 400 porters. They returned to civilisation via the summer route across Saser La. He named this high col between the two glaciers as 'Col Italia', after the Italian explorers. In the year 2000, a party of Indians (Kaivan Mistry, Huzefa Electricwala and Harish Kapadia) stood on this pass on 24<sup>th</sup> August, becoming the only visitor to this high point, after 71 years. And now after two more years our entire Indian-Japanese team crossed this pass and descended the Teram Shehr Glacier – first crossing of Col Italia after 73 years.

### III. The First Exploration of the Teram Shehr Plateau

From Base Camp 2 was had planned explorations and climbs. While the climbing team established a summit camp at 6250 m, two member team of Harish Kapadia and Ryuji Hayashibara with 3 Kumaunis turned south to climb on to the vast Teram Shehr Ice Plateau. This plateau, between from 5650 m to 6250 m is about 16 km long and more than 10 km wide at many places. It is surrounded by high peaks, including Padmanabh (7030 m) and has several deep cols which overlook the Terong Valley in the south and Siachen Glacier in the west. In the east it leads to Col Italia over high cols.

This is a unique feature anywhere in the mountain world and this vast plateau was first seen in photograph of Stephen Venables from Rimo I. In 1985, Muslim Contractor and Jim Fotheringham (of the Siachen Indian-British Expedition, 1985) tried a route from the southern slopes (from Terong valley) to reach the plateau but were unsuccessful. Later the plateau was photographed by other teams but no one had attempted to reach it. The only peak climbed, on the edge of the Teram Shehr Plateau, was Bhujang (6560 m) (Divyesh Muni and Shroff of the Rose expedition, 1998)

Starting from 21<sup>st</sup> of June, in 3 days Kapadia and Hayashibara reached the upper plateau and visited cols to obtain views and complete the exploration. The upper plateau is surrounded by high peaks, 6862 m, 6854 m or 6855 m and many others of similar heights. A party camping here would have plenty of opportunities to undertake climbs. After four days they returned to Base Camp 2 to join the main team.

### IV. The First Ascent of Padmanabh





Hiroshi Sakai, as the climbing leader, formed two teams to fix ropes on the south ridge of Padmanabh. The peak rose as a stupendous pinnacle and had a satellite peak towards east. With its unique shapes and twin peak, sometimes it appeared like Jannu (Kumbhakarana) in Nepal and sometimes as Nanda Devi in Kumaun. But it appeared as a serious challenge from any direction.

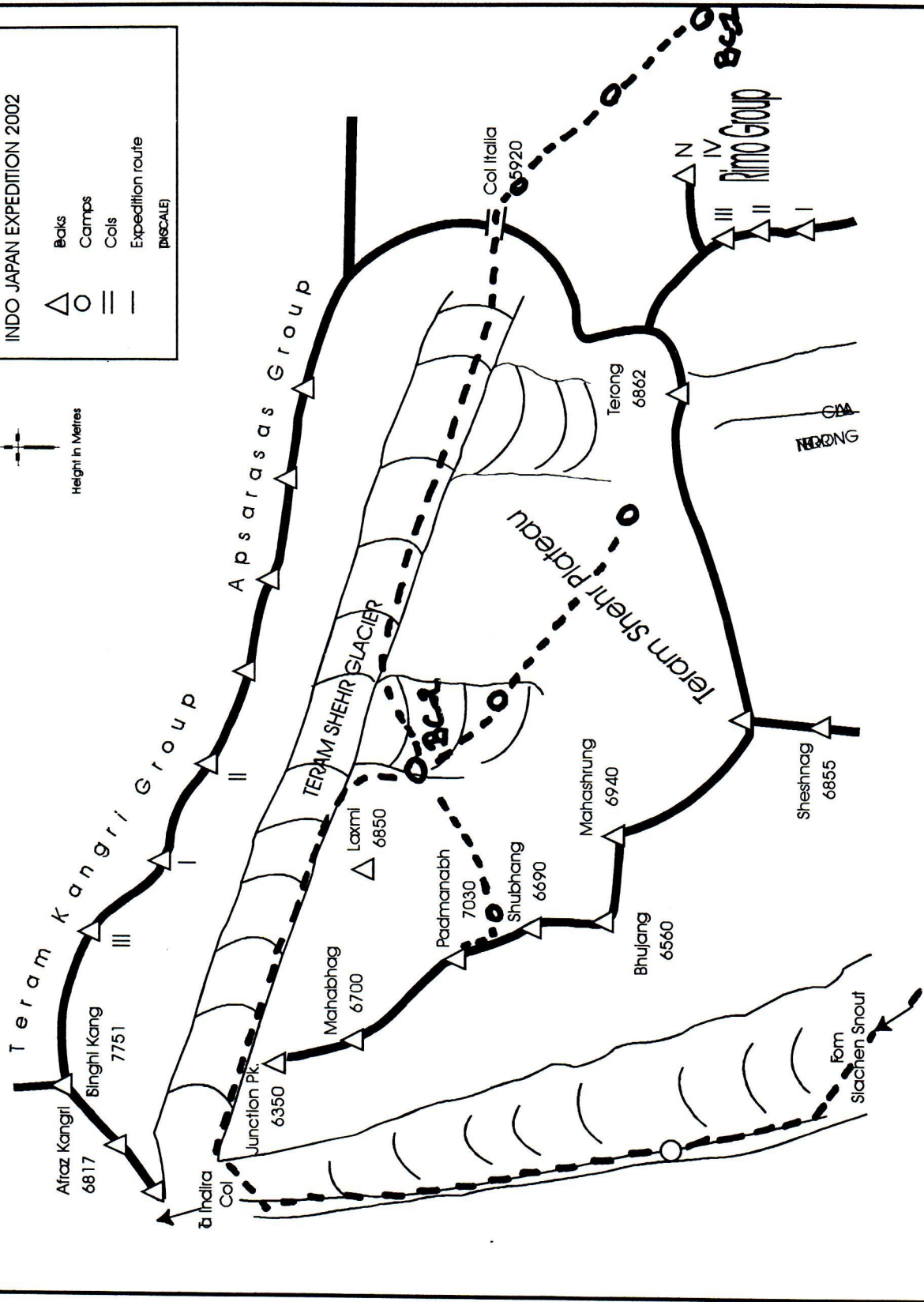
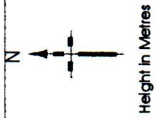
On first two days, a team of Tanahashi, Dam, Rushad and Oe fixed ropes for the first 5 pitches over difficult terrain and in some unclear weather. On 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> June they were replaced by another team of Sakai, Chewang, Huzefa and Tadashi. They pushed the route much higher and particularly Chewang and Sakai fixed several pitches of ropes to reach up to 6700 m. Everybody gathered on 23<sup>rd</sup> June at Base Camp 2 to form two summit teams. The first team of Sakai, Tanahashi and Dam established themselves at the high camp on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June.

#### The Ascent

25<sup>th</sup> June 2002 : The party started from the summit camp (6250 m) at 4 a.m. in strong winds and some unsettled weather. They were climbing up the ropes that was fixed earlier but the progress was slow. At 6.30 a.m., at about 6500 m Dam returned back to the summit camp and Base Camp.

INDO-JAPAN EXPEDITION 2002

-  Bails
  -  Camps
  -  Coils
  -  Expedition route
- (1:50,000 SCALE)



INDO-JAPAN EXPEDITION 2002

Sakai and Tanahashi climbed up to the 16<sup>th</sup> pitch (highest point of the fixed rope) at 6750 m by 8 a.m. The route ahead lay over a steep rock bend nearly vertical and covered with verglass. They fixed three more pitches with rope and from the 20<sup>th</sup> pitch onwards climbed belaying each other. The snow was deep, powdery and unconsolidated making the climb dangerous and slow. Tanahashi led to the west of a long rock pinnacle and climbed a steep gully. The crux of the climb was a gully with deep snow of about 2 m. They were almost 'swimming in snow' as ice axes floated and did not bite in snow. Finally they dug a tunnel to reach the junction of ridges. at 7000 m, at 2.30 p.m. From 6750 m to 7000 m (250 m – 820 ft) had taken them nearly 7 hours of climbing.

They were covered by clouds but constantly in contact with the Base Camp. Luckily they found a little flat place to wait and at 3.10 p.m. they arrived on the summit which was now clearly seen. They spent next 40 minutes, very tired but in great relief and highly satisfied. At the top they hoisted Indian, Japanese and the Japanese Alpine Club flags. They could take pictures of the Siachen Glacier and some of the surrounding peaks. They also set up photograph and memorabilia of Lt. Nawang Kapadia to whom this expedition was dedicated.

By 4 p.m. they started the descent and found the first five pitches very complicated. At one point the rope was stuck and had to be cut. After two hours they unroped to go down the fixed ropes rather quickly to reach the summit camp at 8 p.m. --- after a 16 hour long day. According to Sakai, the climb required speed, stamina and technique. Both of them had previously climbed Nanga Parbat, but according to them, some pitches on Padmanabh were more difficult than anything they had done on that 'Killer Mountain'.

Padmanabh was the highest peak on the Teram Shehr plateau and was so named in 1998 by an Indian team trekking on the Siachen glacier. All the peaks surrounding the Teram Shehr plateau are named after Vishnu, the Lord of Protection, and Padmanabh is one of his infinite forms. It was certainly God that did not fail us.

The second summit team of Chewang, Rushad and Dr. Oe was ready to start for the higher camp on 26<sup>th</sup> of June to attempt the summit the next day. However, a heavy storm which started on the 26<sup>th</sup> morning stopped thoughts of any further ascent of this peak as the mountain would be in bad condition for next few days. We had to be satisfied with this one wonderful ascent.

## **V. The Return via the Siachen Glacier**

Dam and Huzefa had investigated a safe route through maze of crevasses of the Teram Shehr Glacier from our Base Camp 2. On 27<sup>th</sup> June we wound up the expedition and descended through that route to reach the moraines of the lower Teram Shehr Glacier. 15 Ladakhi porters specially arranged for us arrived to carry down the bulk of the luggage. We reached the nearest army camp (at 4870 m). No sooner our tired party reached this camp, Col. Sudhir Varni, Commanding Officer, other officers and ranks of 6 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles looked after us well and we relaxed an additional day at this beautiful place. Brig. S. K. Singh, Commander of 102 Infantry Brigade visited us by flying in specially in a helicopter. We located the place where in 1911, Fanny Bullock Workmen had discovered remains of a Balti village. Over the next three days, a tired party walked down the Siachen Glacier staying at different army camps.

On 1<sup>st</sup> of July everybody gathered at the snout of the Siachen Glacier and immediately went to a temple to express thanks for a most wonderful and safe expedition. Over a period of more than 50 days, trekking and climbing in most remote terrain, we had no major sickness (except one porter who was sent back to safety to Gapshan army camp) or injuries and we had achieved everything as per schedule, and as planned. In a week we returned to civilization and to our homes in Bombay and in Japan.

Looking at the state of the Siachen Glacier and its damaging environment we were reminded more and more about the need to protect the glacier and end this war. (See note on Siachen Peace Park in this report)

## SUMMARY

## Peaks Climbed

## Summiteers

- |   |           |        |                            |  |
|---|-----------|--------|----------------------------|--|
| 1 | Padmanabh | 7030 m | 25 <sup>th</sup> June 2002 | Hiroshi Sakai and Yasushi Tanahashi (1 <sup>st</sup> ascent) |
|---|-----------|--------|----------------------------|--|

## Passes - Crossed – Reached (by all members)

- |   |                |        |                            |
|---|----------------|--------|----------------------------|
| 1 | Chang La       | 5335 m | 15 <sup>th</sup> May 2002  |
| 2 | Kalkatra La    | 4400 m | 20 <sup>th</sup> May 2002  |
| 3 | Depsang La     | 5415 m | 27 <sup>th</sup> May 2002  |
| 4 | Karakoram Pass | 5569 m | 28 <sup>th</sup> May 2002  |
| 5 | Col Italia     | 5920 m | 15 <sup>th</sup> June 2002 |

## Explorations

- |    |                         |                           |   |   |
|----|-------------------------|---------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | Teram Shehr Ice Plateau | 5650 –<br>6250 m<br>16 km | 21 <sup>st</sup> to 24 <sup>th</sup><br>June 2002 | Harish Kapadia and<br>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.

The 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 to its junction with the Shyok river.

## Team:

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Period: 8<sup>th</sup> May to 9<sup>th</sup> July 2002.

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



HIROSHI SAKAI  
Climbing Leader



HARISH KAPADIA  
Leader

Mumbai,  
26<sup>th</sup> July 2002

## Route Details

	Place	Place Height	Kilometres	Hours
<b>Part I Shyok To Karakoram Pass To Gapshan</b>				
1	Shyok	3680	-	-
2	Chhong Jangal	3690	4	4
3	Burma	3760	15	6
4	Charbagh	3920	20	8
5	Yurgolak	4050	18	6
6	Thangnger	4130	20	6
7	Kataklik	4240	10	3
8	Sultan Chushku	4330	15	7
9	Murgo	4550	15	4
10	Burtsa	4600	32	8
11	Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO)	5180	41	8
12	Karakoram Pass, reached	5569	18	3
13	Gapshan	4800	23	2
14	BC 1 (foot of Central Rimo Glacier	4850	7	4
Total			<b>238</b>	<b>69</b>

### Part II BC 1 To BC 2 (Gapshan To Teram Shehr Glacier)

BC 1 (foot of Central Rimo Glacier				
1	C-1: Ahead Of Filippi	4850	-	-
2	Lake	5160	12	5
3	C-2 On Glacier	5250	10	5
4	C-3 at foot of Col Italia	5450	16	10
5	C-4 near Col Italia	5750	10	6
6	Col Italia crossed	5920	3	2
BC-2 At Teram Shehr				
7	Junction	5650	11	5
			<b>62</b>	<b>33</b>

### Part III : On Teram Shehr Plateau

1	Bc-2	5650	-	-
2	On Plateau	5850	4	4
3	Top Plateau	6100	8	6
4	Bc-2	5650	12	4
Forward Logistic Base				
5	on Siachen	4870	14	11
			<b>38</b>	<b>25</b>

### Part IV On Siachen Glacier

Forward Logistic Base on				
1	Siachen	4870	-	-
2	Army C-3	4540	24	8
3	Army C-2	4270	16	7
4	Army C-1	4000	12	6
5	Army BC	3550	12	4
			<b>64</b>	<b>25</b>

### Totals

	Stages	Km	Hours
Part I. Shyok To Karakoram Pass To Gapshan	14	<del>14</del>	<del>238</del>
Part II. BC 1 To BC 2 (Gapshan To Teram Shehr Glacier)	7	238	69
Part III. On Teram Shehr Plateau	5	62	31
Part IV. On Siachen Glacier	5	38	25
	5	64	25
Grand Total	<b>31</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>150</b>

## SIACHEN PEACE PARK

For 18 long years, the armed forces of India and Pakistan have fought on the Saltoro Ridge, south of the Siachen glacier, the highest battlefield in the world. Pakistan occupies the southern and western slopes, India the northern and eastern and the 18- 22,000 ft ridge.

The Line of Control (LOC) of 1972 demarcates the boundary in Kashmir between India and Pakistan up to a point known as NJ9842; beyond that it is left to a vague statement, "...and thence North to the glaciers." As there was neither habitation nor troops in that desolate area, there was no compulsion to be more precise. For 35 years, this vague definition - or lack of it - caused no problem. The LOC is 700 km. long and it is only a small section of it that has thus been left unmarkd. The Siachen and the Saltoro were no-man's land.

It was mountaineering expeditions that brought matters to a head. Access to the Siachen and neighbouring peaks of the Teram Shehr and Rimo glaciers was easier from the Pakistan side; Pakistan began authorising expeditions to the area; India sent in its own expeditions. Both countries interpreted "north to the glaciers" according to their perceived interests, both include the Siachen-Saltoro. In April 1984 India pre-empted a Pakistani plan and moved troops on to the glacier and to the Saltoro Ridge. It occupied the key passes: the Sia La (18,500 ft.) and Bilafond La (18,200 ft.). This in itself was an adventure and an achievement.

Bitter fighting took place, but the heights remained in Indian hands. Since then, sporadic fighting has taken place, and continues to take place, while artillery fire is regularly exchanged with shells lobbed over the ridge at unseen foes. This might not destroy the enemy, but it certainly destroys the environment.

All supplies are brought by helicopter or air dropped: tents, food, fuel, heaters, cookers, equipment, arms, ammunition, weapons, rocket launchers,. Heavy artillery is taken apart and the pieces flown in to be assembled up there. Items get lost in the air drops; the cold metal can take the skin off your hands. The Indian Army has the highest helipad in the world, the highest dropping zone, and the highest public telephone booth! For Pakistan, things are easier. Their base camp, more easily accessible, is at 9000 ft. and their advanced posts are at lower altitudes.

The pollution and degradation of the environment resulting from thousands of men living there is appalling. The cans, drums, fuel containers, oil and lubricants, tetrapacks for fruit juice, aluminium packaging, chemicals, medical waste, can neither be burnt nor destroyed; nor can it be taken back. Human waste amounts to 200 kg. a day on the Indian side alone; it is packed in metal drums and dropped into crevasses. Then there is all the war material: guns, arms, millions of rounds of small arms, ammunition, shells.

And all this garbage and waste will end up in the Nubra river, which flows into the Shyok, which flows into the Indus on the waters of which millions depend. The Himalaya is the water tower of Asia; to juggle with its environment is to gamble with the lives of millions. Apart from the heavy cost in lives and the human suffering, the financial drain is heavy. It costs India an estimated million US dollars a day; the cost to Pakistan is less but is nevertheless a heavy drain.

Recently, with infiltration of armed militants into Kashmir, the 13 December 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament and the 14 May 2002 killings in Jammu, hopes of a solution have faded. As one writer put it, after 1991, the Siachen talks became hostage to the Kashmir militancy programme, and lately to the reluctance of both armies to withdraw from a line which has cost so many lives.

There is one solution which would pick up the near agreement reached in 1989 and give a positive dimension to it: turn the whole area into a Transboundary Peace Park. This would enable both armies to withdraw in conditions of honour and dignity; it would not prejudice their positions on Kashmir as a whole; it would stop further degradation of a magnificent mountain area; it would save thousands of lives and billions of rupees; it would remove a running sore from the Kashmir imbroglio. Any agreement to withdraw forces would, of course, have to be backed by cast iron assurances that there would be no cheating. Ground based and air surveillance, such as is used along the Mexico-US border, or was used in

1973 to monitor the Sinai Desert Cease Fire, could ensure this. The mountain terrain would present special difficulties but from reports of recent discussions, it may be assumed that these can be overcome.

Transboundary Parks are not a new idea. The first one, the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park between Canada and the US was established 70 years ago; today there are 169 such parks, affecting 113 countries. Several of these transboundary parks are specifically designated as Peace Parks, intended to provide a peaceful solution to a conflict or potential conflict, or to the rehabilitation of an area after a conflict. There has been a dramatic increase in transboundary parks in recent years, a demonstration of their viability and usefulness.. In 1988 there were 59 as against the 169 today. There are plans for a six more transboundary parks.

It would be fitting if the Siachen, the longest mountain glacier in the world, were to take a step in that direction. It is situated close to the world's most impressive cluster of 8000 m peaks, in a majestic mountain landscape redolent with the romance of early exploration. It is said, on both sides of the LOC, that to honour the blood of brave soldiers that has been spilled, not an inch of territory should be given up. One could say with even more force that the sacrifice of brave men could best be honoured by protecting a spectacular area consecrated with their blood.

At present, with a million armed men facing each other across the Kashmir border, talk of ending the fighting and of peace parks seems remote. But the dawn always comes after the darkest period; perhaps there will be a dawn for the Siachen also.

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The expedition is grateful to the Indian Army for permission and support to undertake this venture. We are specially thankful to Lt. General R. K. Nanavatty, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, General Officer Commanding – in – Command, Northern Command, Indian Army, without whose support we would not have been able to climb in this area or complete the expedition under difficult situation that developed. While we were on the expedition, war clouds gathered between India and Pakistan and there was a serious possibility of eruption of a conflict. However, GOC, Northern Command and the Indian Army allowed us to continue with our plans exactly as per the schedule and showed great confidence and control over the situation and also in our abilities to cope with it.

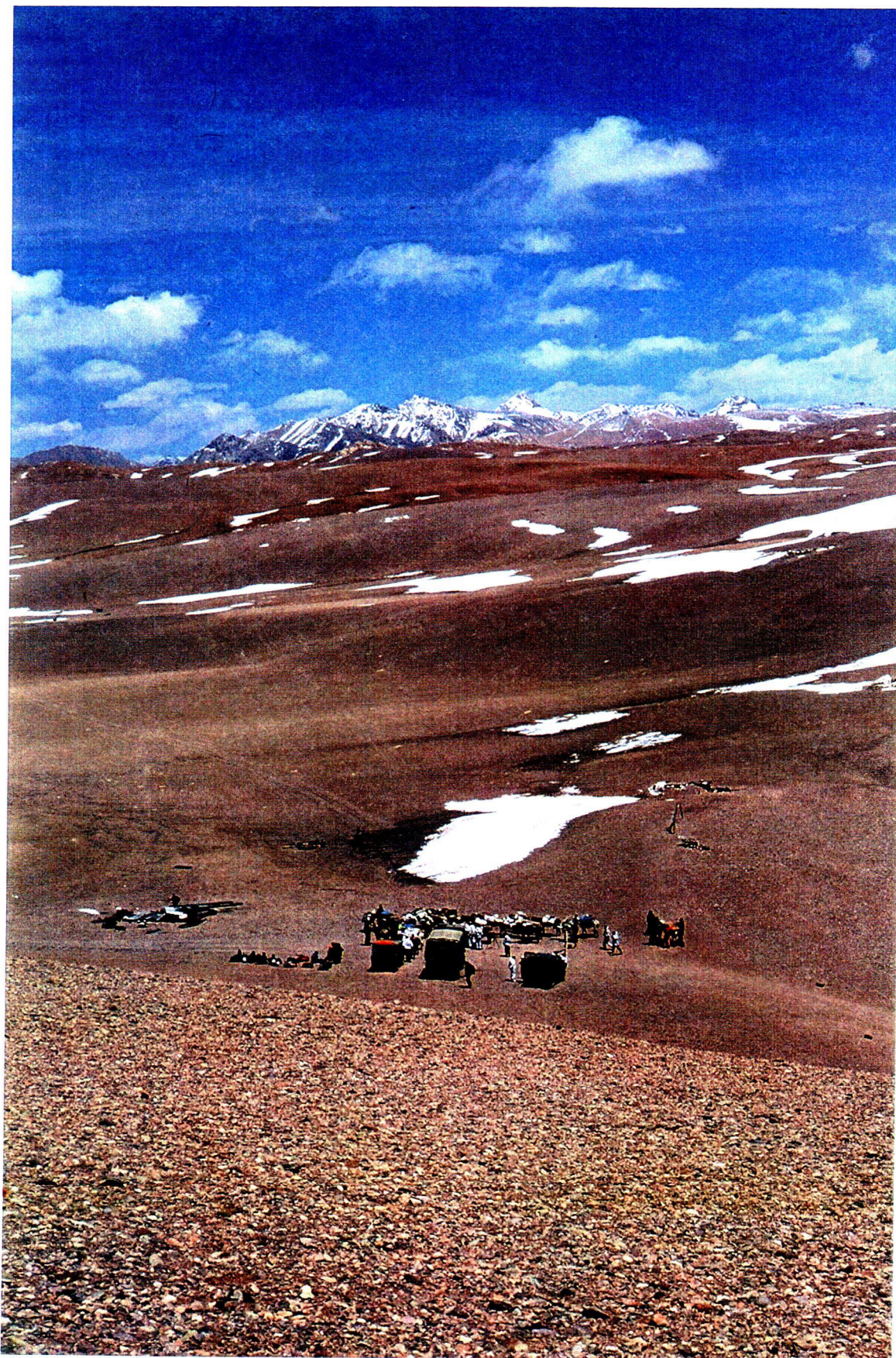


1. Mules en route to Karakoram Pass





2. Ancient Yurgolak Fort on the Shyok River valley.



3. Depsang Plateau from Depsang La.



4. Memorial to Kaivan Mistry at Polu Shelters near DBO.



5. Team on Karakoram Pass: From left: Motup Chewang, Yasushi Tanahashi, Hiroshi Sakai, Huzefa Electricwala, Dr H. Oe, Harish Kapadia Seating: Rushad Nanavatty, Tadashi Fukuwada, Ryuji Hayashibara and Lt Cdr S. Dam

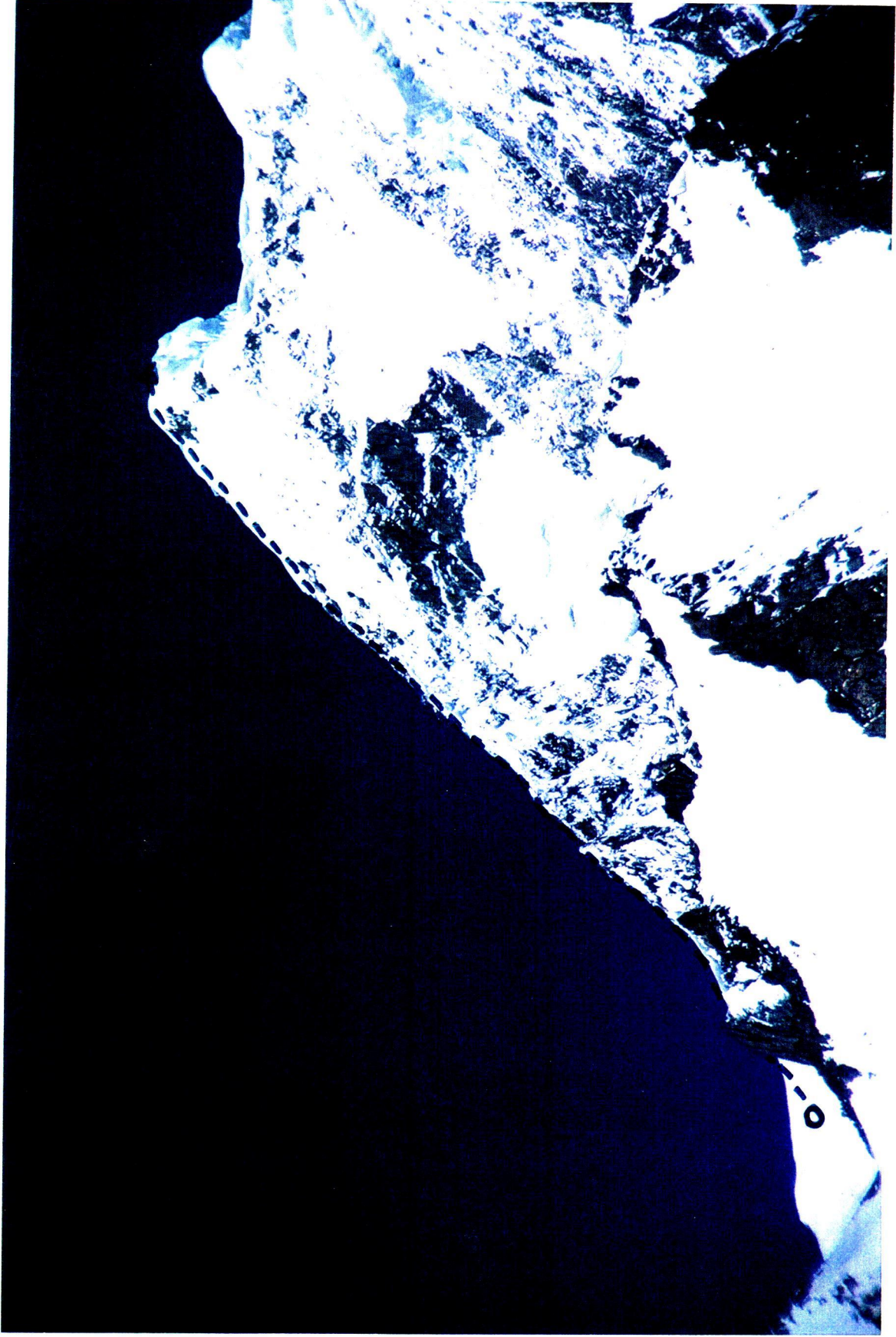




6. Camp on the Central Rimo Glacier. Peak Gyalpo (6678 m) behind.



7. On Teram Shehr Ice Plateau. Looking to Teram Kangri Group (left) and Apsarasas Group (centre) of peaks.



8. Padmanabh Peak (7030 m). Route of first ascent via the south ridge.

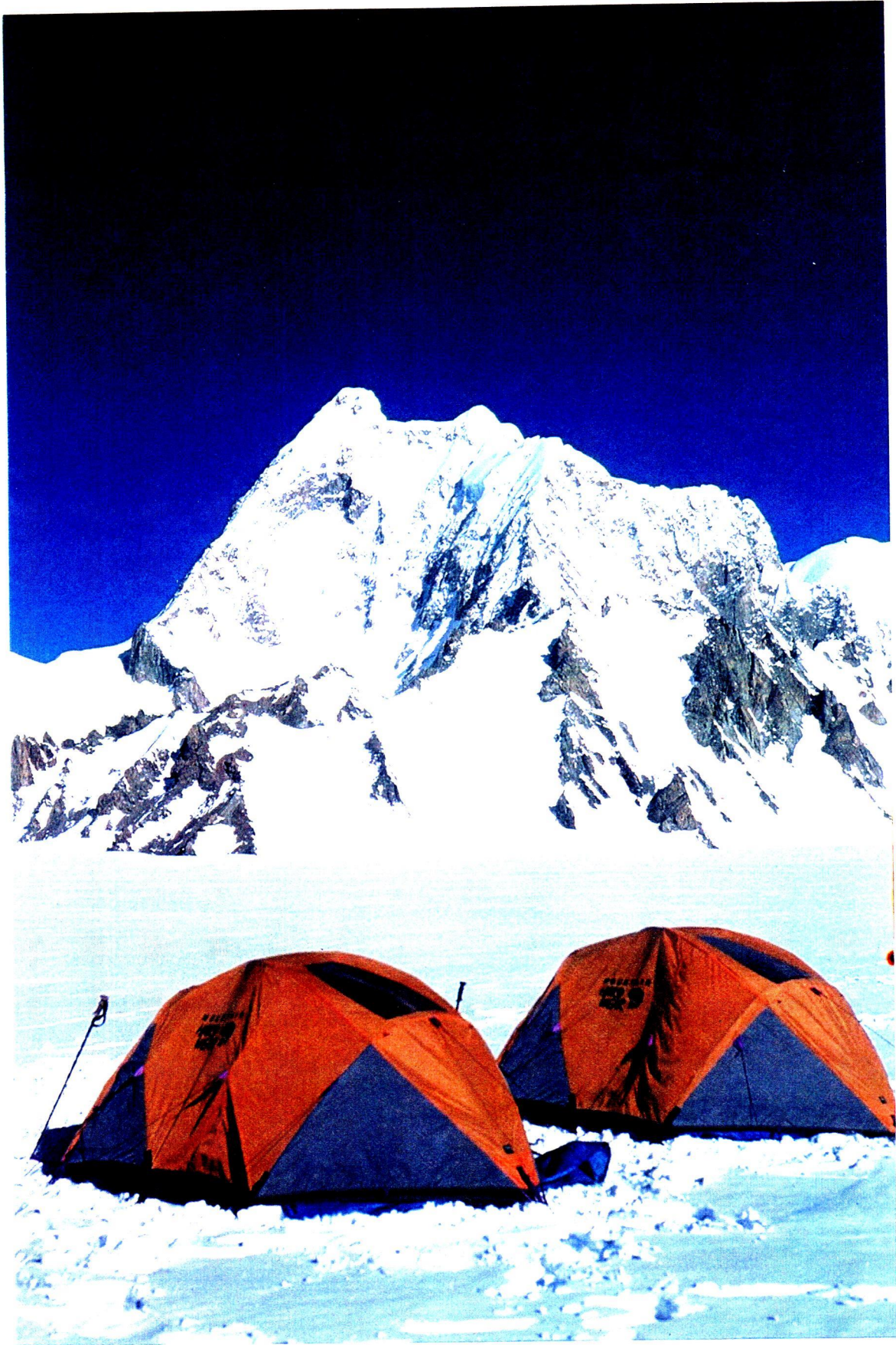


9. Summiters of Padmanabh peak at Base Camp. Yasushi Tanahashi (left) and Hiroshi Sakai on right.





10. With Indian soldiers on the Siachen Glacier.



11. Padmanabh : God that did not fail. View from Teram Shehr Ice Plateau.