



## AAC Publications

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### **Plateau Peak (7,287m), west ridge**

India, East Karakoram

The Kolkata section of the Himalayan Club visited the Saser Kangri Group in July-August, with the aim of making the first ascent of Plateau Peak. Although several teams have tried Plateau Peak in the past, either from the west via the South Phukpoche Glacier or the east via the Sakang Glacier, success has eluded them. Three of the most notable attempts were by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation in 2008, a joint IMF–Border Security Force team in 2009, and the Indian Air Force in 2010.

During our ascent of Saser Kangri IV in 2011, we had a close look at Plateau Peak and decided the only feasible route was the west ridge. However, the sheer rock walls toward the top had an unpalatable appearance. In 2009 the IMF-BSF team reached ca 6,400m, where they were blocked by a rock tower and a sustained period of bad weather. We planned to circumvent this tower via a rather dangerous traverse across an exposed snow face.

We approached via the South Phukpoche Glacier, putting base camp at 4,706m and Camp 1 at 5,391m. From below, the southwest ridge had also looked feasible, but at Camp 1 we saw that access from this side was not possible. Camp 2, on a broad snow shoulder on the lower section of the west ridge, was established on July 18 at 6,015m. The initial section above involved a rock buttress, then a sharp ridge of ice and broken rock. Camp 3 (6,366m) was placed immediately below the difficult rock tower—the high point of the 2009 expedition. We were able to fix the traverse around the rock tower before four days of moderate to heavy snowfall confined us to Camp 1.

On July 28 a Sherpa team set off to find a route on the upper pillar, and a safe passage through the capping seracs leading to the edge of the plateau at ca 7,150m. They returned late that night, having reached the edge of the plateau. All this section was fixed.

We all rested the day and then left at midnight on the 30th. A long, 50–60° traverse on blue ice brought us to the upper rock wall. Here, narrow rock gullies, covered in a thin ice veneer, made the going tricky, despite the fixed ropes. We negotiated a 15m chimney, followed by a six-meter vertical wall, before reaching 40-50° ice slopes between the top of the wall and the serac barrier. At 9:30 a.m. the first climbers reached the western end of the summit plateau.

When all had gathered, we headed east, covering more than 1.2km along the plateau, which is full of humps, before reaching the highest point, as indicated on the Russian map, at 1:30 p.m. on July 31. To the northeast there were two more humps, but we didn't continue to them as ours looked slightly higher. Summiters were Debraj Dutta (leader), Subrata De (Deputy Leader), Prasanta Gorai, and me, with Sherpas Dawa, Lakpa Norbu, Lakpa Tenzing, Mingma (Sr.), and Phurba. We regained Camp 3 a little after 9 p.m.

We did not have access to the Survey of India contour map of this area and had to refer to the Russian map, which marked the highest point as 7,288m, nearly matching the 7,287m in the list published by the IMF. The Spanish map, on the other hand, shows the highest point to be 7,300m. The Himalayan Club and IMF may like to reconcile this difference. GPS equipment, which expeditions are forbidden to carry in this region, would have given the opportunity to measure the actual height of the summit.

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Supplied by Rupamanjari Biswas

## Images



The west ridge of Plateau Peak. The route above ca 6,700m to the plateau is marked; the summit is much farther back.



A tricky section on the upper rock band.

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