



Rongdo Valley, Mariushri, south face and southwest ridge; Tara, north ridge; Amitabha, northwest face and ridge

India, East Karakoram

Rongdo is a remote valley in the eastern part of the Nubra. Historians of South Asia are familiar with this area, as it holds an ancient trade route between Yarkand and northern India (part of the Silk Road). Rongdo Valley is located south of the original trade route, on the east side of the Shyok River. It has seen virtually no tourists, save for a very small number of climbers and researchers.

Tom Longstaff passed by Rongdo Valley as he traveled north in 1909 along the west bank of the mighty Shyok, during his reconnaissance of the Siachen Glacier and Saltoro areas. This region of the East Karakoram is securely guarded by the Indian Army, due to the sensitivity of the border regions with both Pakistan and China.

Having met our congenial liaison officer, Tongpangkokba Jamir, in Leh, on July 28, Graham Rowbotham and I traveled the intermittently disappearing sand road to Rongdo village (3,270m), where it was wonderful to meet locals who remembered me from 2012 (AAJ 2013). Here, we were happy to meet our excellent camp staff: Bir Bahadur (cook) and Noresshri Kulung (cook's assistant), in addition to Tsewang Gylson and Tshering Bhutia, our very competent climbing support staff.

Over the next three days, under generally clear skies, we walked northeast for ca 21km to our 2012 base camp at 4,802m. The following week involved reconnoitering the area, deciding on objectives, and getting supplies to our first advanced base camp (5,538m), on a south arm of the southeast Shukpa Kunchang Glacier, and then to the second advanced base (5,880m), farther northeast on the same glacier. August 9 brought a worsening in the weather and suspected HACE to Tshering, so we all descended to base camp.

On the 13th Graham and I reached advanced base 2, and on the next day Graham climbed the wedge-shaped peak north of camp. He followed the south face and southwest ridge to the 6,167m summit, which he named Mariushri (male Bodhisattva of wisdom; PD). On the 15th, fairly clear skies in the morning prompted us to depart early for the peak just above camp. We followed the broken north ridge and mixed snow and ice slopes to a section of delightful ice climbing at ca 45°. The rocky summit was cold and windy; the GPS read 6,248m. Descent was frigid, with gusting winds (to 65km/hour) blowing us off balance, lots of spindrift, and blinding snow. We named the peak Tara (female Bodhisattva of compassion; AD). An Indian Air Force expedition operated in this area during 2013, but did not climb these two peaks.

We returned to base camp and on the 20th moved down to the last camp we had made before reaching base, at a ca 4,600m shepherds' encampment. From there we moved up a valley to the southeast, where we established a new advanced base at 4,952m. Graham left at 3 the following morning and soloed a 500m rock gully to a 100m wet, slabby ramp, which he followed to gain an icy slope leading to the northwest face of a high peak. The face led to the northwest ridge, which he followed to a foresummit, before continuing over several rock towers to the main summit at 6,335m. Graham named the peak Amitabha (Buddha of infinite light; AD+).

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Images



Tara and the first-ascent route up north ridge.



Joie Seagram on the upper ice slopes of the north ridge of Tara (6,248m).

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