



AAC Publications

Rongdo Valley, Pyramid Peak, Southeast Ridge, Attempt

India, East Karakoram

On June 21, after 18 months of planning, Andrew Basford, Katie Farrell, Matthew Fuller, Steve Hutton, Katie McKay, Dan Slome, and I left London for the East Karakoram, our aim to summit an unclimbed 6,000er via the largely unexplored upper southeast Shukpa Kunchang and Rongdo glaciers. Permits to this part of the Karakoram are very difficult to obtain, often being issued at the last moment. We received ours four weeks prior to departure, leaving just enough time to get everything sorted.

With our liaison officer, Munesh Kumar Kulshrestha, we left Rongdo village (3,200m) and trekked six days to base camp (4,800m), arriving on July 4. Our main objective was a summit referred to by the 2013 Indian Air Force Expedition as Pyramid Peak; for the purposes of our expedition we had denoted this as Peak X3 (6,215m). This peak distinctively guards the upper Rongdo Valley, and is symmetrical and very aesthetic. Despite the peak's prominence, our extensive research had confirmed it was still unclimbed.

On July 5 we established an advanced base at 5,200m, and the following day moved this to 5,430m, just below the southeast Shukpa Kunchang Glacier. There was a considerable amount of snow on the glaciers, covering any potential crevasse hazards. On our first foray above base camp the snow line was around 5100m; a vast change in the weather meant this had risen to 5400m by the time we departed 13 days later. There was evidence of large avalanches through visible crown walls high on the mountains.

On the 8th, Andrew, Katie McKay, Matthew, and I left advanced base and climbed a snow slope onto the Rongdo Glacier. Initial poor snow conditions improved considerably; route-finding was straightforward in the good visibility; there were no crevasses; and as we approached the col between Peak X3 and Ngapo Kangri (Rongdo I), we could see there was no bergschrund. At 4 a.m. we started up the southeast ridge of the former, immediately seeing that it was corniced and steeper than expected. We made good progress up short snow ramps (PD, 50–60°), found the climbing absorbing, and had incredible views of 6,000m and 7,000m peaks. But at 6,050m we turned around due to approaching poor weather and concerns the sun would weaken the cornices. On returning to base camp, we noticed a marked change in the clear, settled weather we had been experiencing, with rain, snow, and poor visibility.

We returned to advanced base on the 11th, but the weather deteriorated further, with additional snowfall. We stayed two nights waiting for a break, but by then time was against us, and as conditions remained poor, we packed up and descended. Frustratingly, the weather improved considerably during our two-day trek down to Rongdo, and hot conditions meant that swollen rivers could only be crossed first thing in the morning.

Our memories are of a fantastic experience: We explored a nearly untouched valley, ventured onto glaciers and mountains where no one had been before, and got within 150m of the summit of a virgin 6,000m peak. Huge thanks must go to the BMC and MEF for their financial support. A comprehensive report of this expedition can be found [here](#). [Note that the expedition report mistakenly refers to the upper Rongdo Glacier as the Sagtogpa Glacier. The various arms of the Sagtogpa are found only to the east of Sagtogpa Col, between Peak 6,125m (Peak X3) and Ngapo Kangri (Rongdo I). In addition, the expedition report gives a height of ca 6,200m for Peak X3. In the AAJ we have used the more recent

figure of 6,215m.]

Ed Poulter, U.K.

Images



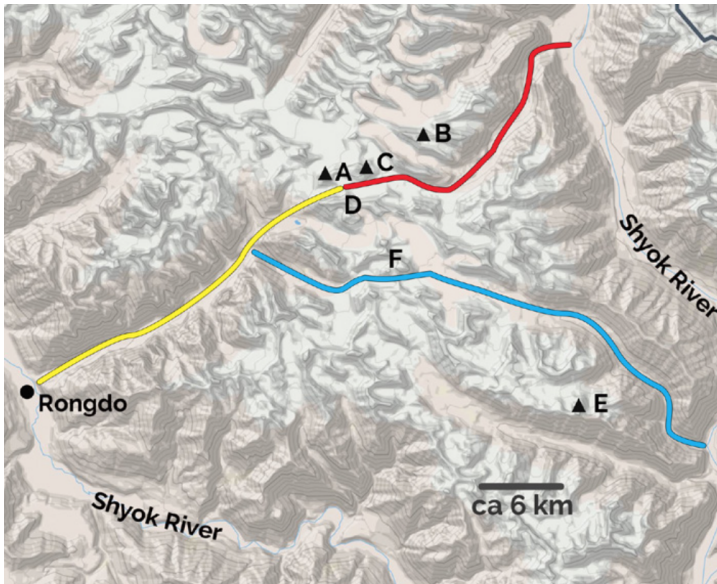
Venturing onto the Rongdo Glacier with unclimbed peaks west of Gazgazri (6,160m, AAJ 2013) in the background.



Peak X3 (Peak 6,215m) from the approach. The team attempted the right skyline ridge.



Site of intermediate advanced base at 5,200m. Unclimbed peaks west of Gazgazri (6,160m, AAJ 2013) seen behind.



In 2015, three expeditions explored various valleys inside the great bend of the Shyok River, east of Rongdo. Yellow line: British climbers attempted (A) Pyramid Peak via the Rongdo Valley. Red line: An Indian expedition climbed (B) Peak 6,195m and (C) Peak 6,305m via the Ryong Kharu Valley. After these climbs, this team crossed (D) Sagtogpa Col and exited the mountains via the Rongdo Valley. Blue line: An Indian Air Force team explored the Kunzang Valley, climbing (E) Tak Jaal and other peaks. The military climbers crossed (F) Kunzang Col and exited via the Rongdo Valley.

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