



AAC Publications

Rassa Glacier, Lak Kangri, Southeast Face; Thrung-ma Kangri, South Face

India, East Karakoram

Obtaining permits for the remote valleys of the Indian East Karakoram can be a difficult and protracted process for non-Indian nationals; a positive outcome is far from guaranteed. Braving the uncertainties, our party of five Alpine Club members, Mike Cocker, Drew Cook, Gus Morton, and me (all U.K.) and Knut Tønsberg (Norway, unfortunately forced to return home due to altitude problems), eventually received permission to attempt one or more of the unclimbed peaks bordering the extensive Rassa Glacier. It was all nail-biting stuff, but our persistence was finally rewarded a few days before leaving for India.

Following our arrival in Leh, we spent two days acclimatizing before crossing the 5,370m Kardung La to the Nubra Valley, where we spent a further two days in Sumur. We then transferred to the village of Tirit, where the motorable road ends at a Buddhist shrine. Here, we met our support team and horses, and over the next three days trekked up the Tirit Valley to a base camp, at 4,756m, near the confluence of the Phunangma and Rassa outflows.

Prior to our arrival, only two mountaineering parties were known to have visited the upper Tirit Valley. The first, in 2001, was an American-British-Indian team in led by Chris Bonington and Harish Kapadia, and the second, in 2014, an Indian expedition led by Divyesh Muni. Whereas the international team focused exclusively on the more southerly Phunangma Glacier, where they made a number of notable first ascents (AAJ 2002), the Indian team broadly explored the Rassa Glacier to make the first ascents of Tusuhm Kangri (6,219m) and the 6,250m Rassa Kangri (see [AAJ 2015 with map](#)). It was Divyesh Muni's articles and photographs that inspired our 2016 expedition.

Virtually all of the major peaks bordering the Rassa Glacier exceed 6,000m, but we had specifically identified Peak 6,315m, southeast of Tusuhm Kangri, as a major objective. We proposed to attempt this by way of the first side glacier, designated Glacier 1 by Muni's team, flowing from the northeast into the main Rassa Glacier.

After establishing base camp on September 5, we spent the next few days exploring optimal routes to the Rassa Glacier before eventually locating our advance base camp at 5,100m on a sandy beach, just below the glacial snout amid the devastation of terminal moraine. Subsequent exploration led to two higher camps on the side glacier: Camp 1 at 5,585m and Camp 2 at 5,675m.

On September 10, and from the higher camp, Cook and I climbed unroped up a prominent 35°–40° snow/ice gully on the southeast face of Peak 6,222m (GPS: 6,266m, 34°38.515'N, 77°50.367'E). This is a summit on the ridge southwest of Tusuhm Kangri. The climb took five hours, was graded AD, and subsequently descended with one 30m rappel. Cocker and Morton made the second ascent by the same route the following day. We chose to call this peak Lak Kangri (Ladakhi for "Raptor Snow Peak"), on account of the unknown bird of prey that flew over the summit just as Gus and Mike were reaching the top.

Following a short spell of poor weather, in which we were confined to base camp, we returned to Camp 2 to attempt Peak 6,315m. Setting out at daybreak on the 19th, Cocker, Cook, Morton, and I ascended the true right bank of the glacier until reaching the base of a narrow rock ridge forming the left arm of the second, prominent, 40° snow/ice couloir on the south face. We climbed unroped until crossing the thinning rock ridge into the main couloir, where the slope steepened to 45°–50° and

became icier. The final 200m were climbed in roped pairs to gain the small, corniced summit. (D, GPS 6,341m, 34°38.746'N, 77°51.408'E). The ascent took seven hours and we descended the same way, making eight 60m rappels to easier ground. We regained Camp 2 just as the sun was setting. We chose to call this peak Thrung-ma Kangri (Ladakhi for "Protector Snow Peak") on account of its prominent position when viewed from the lower subglacier.

The summits of Lak Kangri and Thrung-ma Kangri provide fantastic panoramas that include numerous unclimbed 6,000m peaks bordering the Rassa Glacier, as well as those farther afield. Both mountains, and the climbs themselves, would undoubtedly become classics if they were located anywhere more accessible.

We are indebted to the Mount Everest Foundation, the Alpine Club Climbing Fund, the Austrian Alpine Club, and the Norwegian Alpine Club for their generous support. We also thank Rimo Expeditions and the in-country support team, without whom our task would have been immeasurably harder.

– Derek Buckle, Alpine Club, U.K.

Images



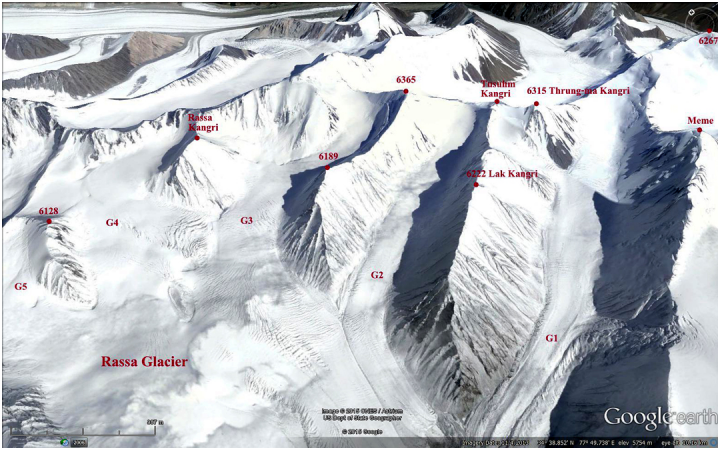
Derek Buckle high on the south face of Thrung-ma Kangri (6,341m GPS).



Looking southwest from Tusuhm Kangri at Lak Kangri (foreground). This peak was climbed from the far side. Glacier 2 is to the right, and the fine distant pyramid is Nya Kangri, attempted by two teams in 2016.



The south face of Thrung-ma Kangri (6,341m GPS) above Glacier 1, showing the route of ascent.



The four peaks climbed to date from the Rassa Glacier: Rassa Kangri (2014); Tusuhm Kangri (2014); Lak Kangri (2016); and Thrungring Kangri (2016).

Article Details

Author	Derek Buckle
Publication	AAJ
Volume	59
Issue	91
Page	0
Copyright Date	2017
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions