



Exploratory Traverse and First Ascent of Nga Kangri

India, East Karakoram

WHEN OUR SIX-MEMBER TEAM set out from Rongdo, a quaint village in Ladakh, we had little idea of our final destination. Our plan was to start trekking at the southernmost village in the Nubra Valley and work our way as far north as possible along the main axis of the mountains to the east of the valley. As the Dalai Lama was scheduled for a weeklong visit to the Nubra, it was impossible to hire any help, whether human or animal. However, the ever-efficient Rimo Expeditions solved the problem by arranging for a dozen horses to be transported by truck from Leh to Rongdo.

The group consisted of Sonali Bhatia, Huzefa Electricwalla, Rajesh Gadgil, Vineeta Muni, Ashish Prabhu, and myself, accompanied by Aditya Kulkarni, a cinematographer, with support from Pasang Bhote, Pemba Bhutia, Sanjay Thakur, and Sunil Thakur. We initially trekked up the Rongdo Lungpa, and after four days established base camp at 5,000m, past a lone shepherd's hut and up steep residual moraine of the Sagtogpa Glacier. From here we explored a route that would cross a high pass to the East Phunangma Glacier. An advanced base was established at 5,500m, and a second camp on the pass itself, which we named the Rongdo La, at 5,800m.

Unfortunately, while ascending to the pass, I slipped on loose rock and was knocked unconscious. Internal bleeding left a sizable bump, and as the blood settled toward my left eye, I began to look like a character out of a horror movie. The injury required that I travel back to Leh to consult with a doctor, who reluctantly let me return to the expedition. We all were back at base camp within a week.

After regaining high camp on the Rongdo La, on August 1 we left at 6:30 a.m. and made our way to the base of a small peak to the northeast. A short, steep snow climb put us on the southwest ridge, and the easy-angled crest led us to the summit. It was 10 a.m. and we named our first ascent Nga Kangri (Ladakhi for "Snow Peak Five," 6,165m). This peak lies on the watershed with the Central and Western Sagtogpa glaciers that flow east to the Ryong Kharu Valley, and is a little to the north of Sagtogpa Kangri (6,305m), climbed in 2015 (AAJ 2016).

We now set off to the north, and a gradual descent brought us to a camp at 5,628m. Next day we were at the junction of the East Phunangma and South Argan glaciers. After several hours of searching, we finally found a safe route to access the South Argan Glacier through a huge icefall. Above this the glacier flattened, and in five hours we were pitching tents at 5,777m, below the high pass that would allow us to cross the ridgeline east of Argan Kangri (6,789m). On August 6 we made the first crossing of the Argan La (5,950m) via a 200m climb, a traverse of a narrow ridge, and a 100m descent to reach the North Argan Glacier.

While this glacier began descending gently, it turned into a high, broken, dangerous icefall that posed a route-finding challenge. Once through this, we made our way to the base of the South Shukpa Kunchang Glacier and ascended this more easily for two days through amazing landscape, with the formidable Saser Kangri II dominating the horizon. We then made the first crossing of the Zamoriyon La (5,860m) to reach the Zamoriyon Glacier, which we followed down to the Sakang Valley. This was an exhausting day, which ended with a steep, difficult, and boulder-strewn slope and a final river

crossing to grassy meadows below the snout of the Sakang Glacier, where we camped at 4,859m.

After a few days of badly needed rest, we trekked to the head of the Sakang Lungpa Glacier, where we decided to end the expedition at a high point on the glacier below Plateau Peak (7,300m). We turned around and descended the Sakang Valley, which proved to be the sting in the tail: Much of the route was washed out by the previous year's heavy rain, and we had to cross large sections of exposed mountainside on a nonexistent trail. We finally reached Tigur in the Nubra Valley on August 18.

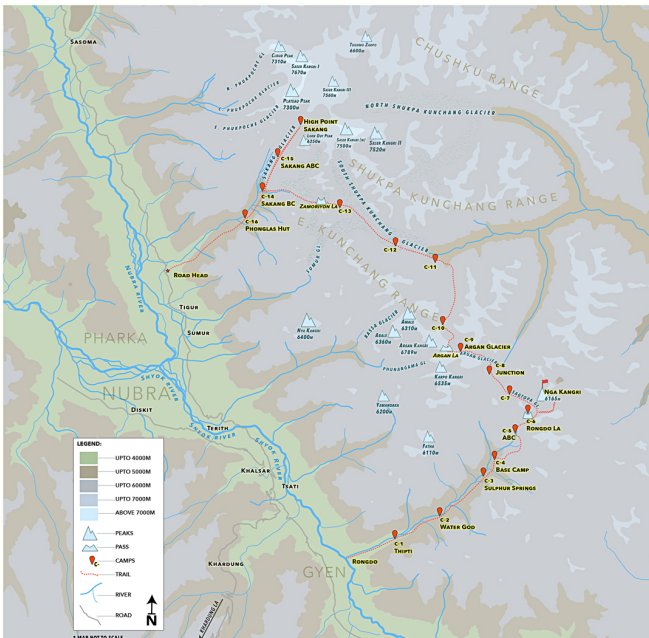
We had completed more than 100km of traverse across pristine glaciers, crossed three high passes (two new), and made the first ascent of Nga Kangri. We were satisfied at having pushed our limits—both physical and mental.

– Divyesh Muni, Himalayan Club, India

Images



The team about to make the first crossing of the Argan La (5,950m) and descend to the North Argan Glacier (right). The east ridge of Argan Kangri (6,789m) is behind. Argan Kangri was probably first climbed in 1970 (AAJ 2004).



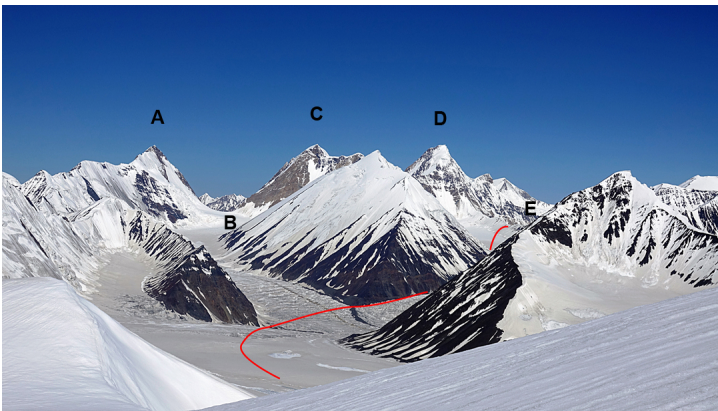
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Nga Kangri from the south-southwest after crossing the Rongdo La. The route of ascent climbed the broad glaciated slope from the right to reach the upper southwest (left skyline) ridge. Divyesh Muni



A precarious trail on the descent of the Sakang Lungpa.



Looking northwest down the Sagtoga Glacier to the junction between the East Phunangma Glacier (left) and South Argan Glacier. The route taken by the 2017 Indian expedition is shown. (A) Karpo Kangri (6,535m). (B) Konto La. (C) Argan Kangri II (6,640m), (D) Argan Kangri (6,789m). (E) Argan La, the crossing of which led to the North Argan Glacier.



Looking southeast from the upper section of the South Argan Glacier. The 2017 Indian expedition ascended from the Sagtoga Glacier in the distance, in front of the conspicuous snow pyramid, Sagtoga Kangri (6,305m), climbed from the far side in 2015.

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