



AAC Publications

Rongdo Valley, Sa'i Lhamo, Northwest Ridge

India, East Karakoram

On the northwest ridge of Sa'i Lhamo, with (A) Karpo Kangri (6,535m), (B) Argan Kangri (6,789m), (C) Peak 6,420m, and (D) Gazgazri (6,150m) in the back. Photo by Cyril Renailler

In the summer of 2016, Pascal Hottiaux, Alain Pozo, Cyril Renailler, and I visited the Rongdo Valley, which extends to the northeast of Rongdo village and the Shyok River. It was the lack of information that attracted us: We knew, thanks to AAJ reports, that only a few groups had preceded us and this would guarantee tranquility and great potential for exploration and discovery.

Our first problem was reconstructing the path into the valley, which had been washed away by flooding above the village. We acclimatized in the area called Thipti, where we did a lot of rock climbing and bouldering. The Rongdo Valley is home to many granite walls, where numerous routes could be opened.

We established base camp at 4,850m above some hot springs. We then explored different valleys to find an aesthetic line that suited our abilities. The northwest ridge of Sa'i Lhamo ("Earth Goddess," 6,030m according to the first ascensionists, 34°31'34.20"N, 77°58'3.70"E) fitted the criteria, and we set up advanced base at 5,250m on a grassy shoulder with sumptuous views of the upper Rongdo Valley and Sagtogpa Glacier.

We climbed the mountain on July 25 (Alain's 62nd birthday) in a 19-hour trip from advanced base. There were no real difficulties, but the distance was deceptive, as we had to travel around the entire mountain to reach the route. After gaining the 5,800m col at the start of the northwest ridge, we followed the crest—easy at first, then more exposed—to an airy passage beneath cornices on the east flank. A spectacular, elegant ridge then led to the summit, a superb viewpoint on which our altimeter recorded 6,038m. This is likely to be the first ascent of this route, as the original ascensionists, the 2013 Indian Air Force Expedition (AAJ 2014), climbed the southwest ridge. However, it is possible that a small, discreet team like ours may have been here previously. It's difficult to know.

There are dozens of mountains and untouched faces in this region. The inhabitants of Rongdo are very welcoming, and we must especially thank our horsemen, without whom nothing would have been possible.

– Laurent Lafforgue, France

Images



On the northwest ridge of Sa'i Lhamo, looking east-southeast at Satti Kangri (6,520m) in the background.



Climbing the northwest ridge of Sa'i Lhamo during the probable first ascent of this route.



The meadows at Thipti in the Rongdo Valley, where the surrounding granite walls hold much potential for new rock routes.



On the northwest ridge of Sa'i Lhamo, with (A) Karmo Kangri (6,535m), (B) Argan Kangri (6,789m), (C) Peak 6,420m, and (D) Gazgazri (6,150m) in the back.

Article Details

Author	Laurent Lafforgue
Publication	AAJ
Volume	62
Issue	94
Page	0
Copyright Date	2020
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions