



## AAC Publications

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### **Oma Kangri, First Ascent, East-Southeast Ridge**

India, Ladakh

**Do you want to attempt an unclimbed 6,000m mountain?** You would think climbers would be queuing up to say “yes,” but, unfortunately, finding a partner can be difficult. My regular partner is in a new relationship and said, “Getting permission from my girlfriend is harder than getting permission from the Indian Mountaineering Foundation”. In my 60-plus age bracket, others I asked were either busy or not too keen.

The solution was to team up with a good Ladakhi friend as a two-man expedition. However, we were told that expeditions to the border regions must include at least two foreigners. Blocked by bureaucracy, my friend Tsewang Gyalson came up with an idea. Near his home village of Hundar Dok in the Nubra region (this village straddles the Thanglasgo River at approximately 34°30'15.89"N, 77°25'11.58"E, and is more or less joined to Wachen just to the north) were several 6,000m peaks, some of which he believed were unclimbed. Furthermore, as Hundar Dok is not in a border region, Tsewang thought it might be possible to get permission locally. In a rush, I trawled the internet, checking the AAJ and other journals, and found some interesting possibilities. A friend of Tsewang's, Jigmet Phunstong, agreed to join us and a plan emerged.

Using Google Earth, we found a side valley that mountaineers had never visited, with four unclimbed 6,000m mountains southwest of Spanpuk (6,183m, 34°33'40.31"N, 77°20'40.38"E). Access looked challenging, but Tsewang made a weekend recce. Villagers said the shepherds' path had not been used since a 2010 cloudburst. Optimistically, we hoped the old path would be passable with horses and booked a local horseman.

The IMF team in Leh were extremely helpful, and we were issued with the necessary permit within an hour. Previous applications had either taken months or had been rejected at the last minute, so we couldn't believe our luck. The issue of whether a liaison officer was required was also quickly solved by Tsewang's argument that the valley we would visit was so close to his home that nobody would know the area better than him.

A visit to Ladakh by the Dalai Lama then changed our plans. Our horseman wanted to attend the Dalai Lama's sermons, so we were forced to approach Hundar Dok from the south, via the Lasirmou La pass. Once in Hundar Dok, we discovered the shepherds' path was dangerously loose and clearly impossible for horses. Fortunately, three of Tsewang's cousins saved the day by acting as porters and we eventually arrived, in rain, at a base camp (4,780m, 34°31'3.95"N; 77°21'27.99"E) east of our peak.

Two days later, we woke to blue skies and moved to an advanced base camp, digging a platform in moraine at 5,300m in a wide gully (34°31'7.58"N, 77°20'19.06"E). On the next day, August 3, we got up at 2:30 a.m. Climbing by headlamp up loose, rocky flanks, we reached a small glacier at dawn, and continued up 30–40° snow and ice slopes unroped. We arrived on the east-southeast ridge and the angle steepened to greater than 50°. There were cornices and we proceeded roped. The last 250m of the climb was in perfect condition, with 4cm of new snow over good ice. At 10:30 a.m. we reached the 6,037m summit (34°31'22.46"N, 77°19'23.33"E).

To one side were views of the massive, snow-clad mountains of the East Karakoram. To the other side, adjacent to our peak, was an unclimbed mountain that looked like a fortress, guarded by slabs and steep slopes. We were truly in awe. Tsewang and Jigmet built a cairn and hung prayer flags,

chanting Kiki So So Lhargyalo (“victory to the mountain gods”), the traditional Buddhist prayer recited on mountain passes and summits.

Tsewang took a picture of our deserted base camp 1,200m below and said, “There’s something wrong: Our cooking tent has fallen down”. He was right; although we had pitched it robustly, strangely our tent was now flattened.

When we arrived at base camp, the puzzle was immediately solved. Two yaks and about 20 cattle were in the valley and had trampled our tent. They had then feasted on all our fresh vegetables, spiced with two pounds of garlic, two pounds of ginger, 10 pounds of flour, and boxes of curry powder, cumin, garam masala, turmeric, salt, and baking powder. The herd had swallowed everything, boxes and all. They must have enjoyed it, but the laxative effects of the spices and baking powder were all too obvious. That evening we “feasted” on plain rice and our last tin of tuna, under the gaze of the (still) hungry yaks and cattle.

The approach to base camp and the ascent to the summit took nearly two weeks, in which the only rain-free days coincided with the ascent. Hunder Dok villagers told us the mountain had no local name, but the valley below is known for excellent grazing and providing excellent milk. That led to the name Oma Kangri (“Milk-Giving Peak”), which has been officially registered. The villagers were pleased with the name and proud that someone from Hunder Dok was on the first ascent.

It is estimated there are over 300 unclimbed 6,000m peaks in Ladakh, and some of these are in non-border regions, where it is possible to obtain a permit directly in Leh. However, summer weather in Ladakh appears less predictable than it was a decade ago.

— Keith Goffin, Germany

## Images



Looking southwest during the ascent of Oma Kangri toward a fortress-like peak of around 6,200m.



Oma Kangri from the vicinity of base camp, with the east-southeast ridge falling directly toward the camera from the summit. The summit to the right is around 6,100m.



Looking southwest from the summit of Oma Kangri along the ridge connecting with a fortress-like peak of around 6,200m (on left).

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