



AAC Publications

Kang Yatze Group, Historical Ascents

India, Ladakh

Ibstei Kangri from the east face of Kang Yatze I. Photo by Simon Fraser.

During the summer of 1976, I was part of a British university expedition that made ascents of the now popular trekking peak Stok Kangri as well as four neighboring peaks of 5,700m–6,000m to the east, one of which had a summit cairn from an earlier ascent. Ladakh had just opened to foreigners in 1974, and when Mark Dravers, Mike Ritchie, Terry Rollerson, and I climbed the east face (an easy snow slope) of Stok Kangri, it was probably the third ascent.

From the summits of these peaks, we noticed a conspicuous peak farther south, marked on the 1:250,000 Survey of India maps as 21,000' (6,400m) but unnamed; it is now known as Kang Yatze I. We approached it via the Gongmaru La (5,200m) at the head of the Markha Valley, but we ran out of time and food to make an attempt. We then descended the Markha Valley, which in 1976 seemed like a mysterious Shangri La that very few outsiders, if any, had visited.

We returned in 1977, hiring four horses and two horse wallahs for three months, so we could travel with all our equipment and several weeks of food. We spent July crossing Zaskar from south to north, en route attempting a prominent rocky peak on the west side of the Singe La (a.k.a. Singi La, ca 5,000m), locally named Stonba and around 5,950m. We turned back on August 1 at about 5,750m on a steep section of extremely loose and dangerous rock on the east buttress. [Later climbing history on this peak is unknown.]

We continued to Lamayuru and Leh, resupplied, and set off for Kang Yatze via the Gongmaru La, establishing our base camp at Nimaling (4,750m), a summer grazing area below the north face. To explore the various peaks more closely, we found a route along the eastern side of Kang Yatze I and camped at about 5,250m. Mark Dravers and I then followed the glacier toward the north face of the peak now known as Ibstei Kangri (6,340m; see AAJ 2011) and climbed steep snow slopes on the right to a col at 6,000m below its northwest ridge. This proved straightforward mixed ground and led to a beautiful summit where we spent well over an hour enjoying the extensive views from one of the highest peaks in the area.

On the 23rd, Dravers, Ritchie, and I climbed Kang Yatze I—probably the first ascent—having decided from our reconnaissance that the eastern side of the peak had a feasible route via a snow couloir. Skirting fresh avalanche debris in the couloir, we headed for a rocky spur to the left and followed this quite easily to the south ridge at about 6,100m. This ridge led with no great difficulty to the summit. Mist and cloud had rolled in, but through it we could make out what appeared to be a cairn on the lower, neighboring 6,175m peak now known as Kang Yatze II. Perhaps this peak had been reached by a Survey of India team many years earlier.

View to the west from the upper slopes of Gapo Ri toward the prominent peak of Shan Ri. To the south of Gapo Ri and Shan Ri, largely unvisited glaciated country may hold unclimbed peaks. Photo by Simon Fraser.

After resting in the Markha Valley, we explored a valley to the east of Nimaling, camping at 5,100m below a peak now named on the map as Gapo Ri. On September 1, we all climbed this peak by its long east ridge and the final summit pyramid. From this fine summit at 6,200m, we descended the west ridge to complete a traverse, returning down the glacier to our camp.

We had noticed another prominent peak (probably Shan Ri, 6,198m; see AAJ 2019) farther to the west, and Mike Ritchie and I tried to approach it from the Langtang Valley on the western side of Kang Yatze. We climbed a tributary valley to a glacier and camped at 5,250m. On the 5th we reached a col at 5,650m and only then realized that our intended peak was farther south across another glacier. However, the peak above us was also attractive and unclimbed, and we headed along its west ridge to the summit at 6,310m. Forty-five years later, I discovered in the AAJ that this peak has been climbed again a couple of times by other routes and is now known as Kang Yatze III (see AAJs 2016 and 2018). The ascent was straightforward apart from much colder temperatures as autumn approached. Back at our valley camp, we climbed a minor peak of about 5,450m to the south of Zalung Kurpo La.

Later in September, I was joined by two friends, the late Nick Woods and the late Ian Coward. We attempted Shan Ri from the Langtang Valley. This time we located the correct glacier approach but were driven off by bad weather. We then crossed the Zalung Kurpo La leading to Zanskar via the Chang Chu gorge, which can only be accessed in the autumn and winter when the glacial meltwater levels subside. Ian and Nick climbed a 5,700m peak above Padam before returning to Lahul with our horses. I returned to Markha for a few weeks to continue learning Ladakhi and to complete our expedition's human geography study. We had enjoyed wonderful exploratory mountaineering on routes mostly of PD standard.

— Simon Fraser, U.K.

Images



Stonba from the north. This peak lies west of the Singe La and was attempted in 1977 via the east buttress to within approximately 200m of the summit (high point marked X).



Mark Dravers on the summit of Ibsti Kangri (6,340m) in 1977. The view is to the south, with Gapo Ri (6,200m), also climbed that year, to the left.



On the northwest ridge of Ibsti Kangri during the first ascent.



Ibsti Kangri from the east face of Kang Yatze I.



On the summit ridge of Ibsti Kangri with Kang Yatze III behind and to the right.



On the south ridge of Kang Yatze I. Behind and left is Ibsti Kangri, while just right of center is Kang Yatze III.



View to the west from the upper slopes of Gapo Ri toward the prominent peak of Shan Ri. To the south of Gapo Ri and Shan Ri, largely unvisited glaciated country may hold unclimbed peaks.

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