

EAST KARAKORAM

Singhi Kangri second ascent, and other peaks on the Siachen Glacier. It is reported that an Indian Army expedition, organized by the Corps of Engineers and led by Col. Dinesh Kumar, made the second ascent of 7751m Singhi Kangri close to the head of the Siachen Glacier. In the process members of the team also made the first ascent of a subsidiary 7195m summit, which they refer to as Mercury. The report suggests these two summits were reached on October 2. Other members of the expedition are said to have subsequently climbed Teram Kangri I (7464m), II (7407m), and III (7382m). The group also reached the Indira Col at the head of the Siachen. Other Indian climbers have protested that the name Mercury is totally unsuitable for peaks in this region and should not be encouraged.

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The Arganglas Group, exploration and first ascents. During September a joint Indo-American-British expedition explored the previously unvisited Arganglas Group, which lies south of the Sasar Kangri Range. The Arganglas region is home to the Argans, a community comprising the offspring of Yarkandi (or Kashmiri) Muslims who used to frequent the trade routes to Central Asia, and the local Ladakhi women with whom they cohabited.

After a three-day trek across the 3890m Chamba La, British mountaineers Chris Bonington (joint leader) and Jim Lowther, with Americans, Mark Richey and Mark Wilford, and Indians, Satyabrata Dam, Harish Kapadia (joint leader), Divyesh Muni, Cyrus Shroff, Liaison Officer Vrijendra Lingwal, and Sherpas, Samgyal and Wangchuk, reached a 4800m base camp at the foot of the Phunangama Glacier. Subsequently, the expedition attempted five peaks, reached three passes, and explored five glaciers.

The team split into groups with Shroff and Muni along with Samgyal Sherpa climbing a 6360m virgin peak in the Nono Glacier, which they named Abale (Grandfather). Satyabrata Dam, a navy officer from Mumbai, liaison officer Capt. Lingwal and Sherpa Wangchuk climbed another peak, Amale (6312m Grandmother). Bonington and Lowther with Muni and Shroff put their energies into the far more remote Argan Kangri (6789m), the highest peak in the range, but were unable to really get to grips with the mountain due to avalanche-prone conditions.

Dam and Kapadia with three porters explored the Rassa and Yah Glaciers. A camp was first made in the Rassa glacier and from here the pair unsuccessfully attempted Thugu Peak (6158m). They then traversed west to enter the Yah Glacier which is near the shapely peak of Nya Kangri (6480m). The glacier was full of rocky debris and no water was available except near the snout. They camped at the snout and proceeded along the glacier, camping again below its northwestern head. The following day, September 23, the steep pass, Yah La (5770m), was gained but it was not possible to descend the other side toward the Sumur Lungpa as intended. The party retraced their route back to the Arganglas valley. The expedition also reached Konto La (5920m), a col between Karpo Kangri (6540m) and Pk 6640m at the eastern head of the Phunangama Glacier.

The highlight of the trip was the first ascent and subsequently epic descent of Yamandaka (6218m), south of base camp on the southern rim of the Phunangama Glacier. From the day they arrived at base Richey and Wilford had been captivated by an obvious, direct line up the north face of Pk 6218m. The wall was estimated to be about 1,200 meters high and a steep mix

of rock and ice. On September 8 the two Marks crossed the Phunangama glacier and set up camp below the face. From the 9th to the 12th the pair climbed over 20 pitches, each of around 60 meters, on technical rock, ice, and mixed ground. All rock climbing was done with crampons in full winter conditions.

The summit was reached on September 13 after a storm. Due to the heavy snowfall their original plans to descend the northeast ridge to the Phunangama glacier seemed excessively dangerous. Instead, they opted for a descent of the south face to the unknown Shingskam Topko valley on the opposite side of the range. Following an epic descent through canyons and waterfalls, they descended to the Nubra, where they met a very relieved porter sent down from base camp to look for them. That day the rest of the expedition was about to organize a helicopter search. Richey and Wilford named the climb Barbarossa after the World War II German/Russian conflict, and the peak was later named Yamandaka after a Buddhist God, who is fearsome but at the same time benevolent. (*Editor's note: A full account of this climb appears early in this journal.*)

This was a happy expedition and the members formed a very well-knit team, demonstrating that international expeditions need not necessarily involve endless squabbles and displays of flag-waving or chest-thumping. If there were regrets it was because, as Jim Lowther said, "We were here for enjoyment, for pleasure, for a challenge, but our very playground (the Siachen) is also a battle arena, where men are fighting, sacrificing their lives."

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LADAKH

Pangong Range, several ascents. A young team of soldiers from the crack 8 Mountain Division of the Indian Army made several ascents in the remote Pangong Range. These peaks lie close to the border with Tibet and are sandwiched between the Military Road southeast of Leh and the huge Pangong Lake (135 kilometers in length) straddling the border to the north. The expedition was led by Lieutenant Colonel Ashok Abbey, an experienced mountaineer and current Principal of the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering in Uttarkashi, Uttaranchal State.

Base camp was established on August 21 at Tatsang Lungpa (4900m), close to the drivable track between Thangtse and Chushul. The team then moved north to make an advanced camp at 5560m. Higher camps were established at various sites to attempt four peaks: Kangju Kangri (6725m), Unnamed Peak (6580m), Kastet Kangri (6461m), and Unnamed Peak (6134m). Details are as follows: Kangju Kangri via the south face on August 30 (summitteers: Lt. Col. A. Abbey, Sub Ram Lal, Hav Shurbir Singh, Nk Shashi Bhusan, L/Nk Manjeet Singh, L/Nk Anoop Singh, and L/Nk Upinder Singh); Unnamed Peak 6580m via the south face and southwest ridge on Sept 2 (summitteers; Lt. Col. A. Abbey, Sub Prem Singh, Hav Baljinder Singh, Nk RK Manahas, L/Nk Bhagat Singh, Hav Gulbar Singh, L/Nk Sudhir Kumar, Nk Vijay Kumar L/Nk Upinder Singh, and L/Nk Rakesh); Kastet Kangri via the southeast face and southwest ridge on September 3 (summitteers; Capt. R. Bhandari, Capt. PS Cheema, Lt. S. Charan, Sub Ram Lal, Nb Sub Gian Chand, L/Nk Manjeet Singh, L/Nk Bhagat Singh, L/Nk Anoop Singh, L/Nk Jagdeep Singh, L/Nk Dhyan Singh, and Rfn Satender Singh); Unnamed Peak 6134m via the northwest face on September 3 (summitteers; Lt. Col A. Abbey, Hav Shurbir Singh, Nk Shashi Bhusan, L/Nk Rakesh and Sepoy P Vellu).