

EAST KARAKORAM

Teram Shehr Ice Plateau traverse. The Indian–Japanese East Karakoram Expedition, consisting of five Indian and five Japanese mountaineers, undertook a long traverse of the Eastern Karakoram valleys between May 8 and July 9. We achieved a lot, covering almost 550km with various repeated load ferries. We carried almost 2,500kg of food, equipment and personal gear, first on 55 mules, later with personal ferries by 11 members and 15 Sherpas and porters. We lived continuously on the snow for almost 35 days, braving rather cold temperatures. There were no injuries, accident or sickness except to one porter.

The team traversed an historic route in the Shyok Valley and returned via the Nubra Valley (the Siachen Glacier). Five passes were reached or crossed, two large glaciers were fully traversed and a vast unknown ice plateau was explored. Above all, the first ascent of virgin and difficult Padmanabh (7,030m) was achieved.

The team traveled the Shyok River valley from Shyok village (Tankse-Darbuk) to the Karakoram Pass, following the ancient winter trade route between India and China and becoming the first expedition to achieve this in the last five decades. It was also the first time in the history of independent India that a team involving foreign mountaineers was permitted to visit the Pass. A lone British photographer had reached the pass in 1997. This was also the first time that Japanese had stood on the pass in the last 93 years.

The team traversed the entire Central Rimo and Teram Shehr glaciers by crossing Col Italia, the high pass between the two glaciers. It was the first time the pass had been traversed since the original crossing in 1929. Most of the Indian members had previously reached the pass in 2000 but had not crossed it.

The high and vast Teram Shehr Ice Plateau was explored and various cols surrounding the Plateau were investigated. The Plateau is a unique feature in the Karakoram, with ice and snow at a height of about 6,200m surrounded by high peaks on all sides. Harish Kapadia and Ryuji Hayashibara were the first people to reach the Plateau, seen so often in photos taken from peaks such as Rimo.

The first ascent of Padmanabh (7,030m) was made on June 25 by two Japanese members, Hiroshi Sakai and Yasushi Tanahashi (see Sakai's report below). Both had previously climbed Nanga Parbat but rated this peak more difficult in some aspects. Padmanabh is the highest peak on the Teram Shehr Plateau and the first major unclimbed peak in the Siachen Glacier to be ascended for many years. The team returned via the Siachen Glacier to the Nubra Valley.

The international team was the first to climb on the war-torn Siachen glacier since 1986 and the Japanese were the first mountaineers from their country to visit the glacier from the Indian side since the conflict began in 1984. Many Japanese teams had climbed on the Siachen Glacier between 1972 and 1983, approaching it from the west.

The Indian portion of the team was Harish Kapadia (Leader), Motup Chewang, Lt. Commander S. Dam, Huzefa Electricwala, and Rushad Nanavatty. The Japanese portion was: Hiroshi Sakai (Deputy & Climbing Leader), Tadashi Fukuwada, Ryuji Hayashibara, Dr. Hirofumi Oe, and Yasushi Tanahashi. A liaison officer from the Indian army, Capt. Madhab Boro, accompanied the team. Our expedition was organized by the Japanese Alpine Club and The Mountaineers Bombay, Mumbai, India. The expedition is grateful to the Indian Army for permission and support to undertake this venture. We are specially thankful to Lt. General R. K. Nanavatty, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, General Officer in Command, Northern Command,

Indian Army, without whose strong support we would not have been able to climb in this area or complete the expedition under the difficult situation that developed.

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Padmanabh, first ascent. Almost all the unclimbed 7,000m peaks surrounding the Siachen Glacier were scaled in the 1970s by expeditions entering the region from Pakistan. Padmanabh remained virgin. The period allocated to climbing during



Padmanabh 7,030m (center) from midway between Col Italia and base camp. Hiroshi Sakai

our traverse of the Teram Shehr Ice Plateau (see above) was 15 days from a second base camp at 5,650m back to the same camp. On June 14 an advance party went up an easy glacier and reached a col on the south ridge at 6,250m. Their reconnaissance led to the conclusion that an attack camp should be set up near the col. The mostly granite south ridge has an average angle of 45°-50°. We thought this would yield to relatively easy climbing. However, the south ridge comprised small but complicated snow ridges, which appeared one after another. In some places the angle reached 70°-80°. Route preparation up to 6,750m required four working days, and 16 rope lengths were fixed to this point. Two teams consisting of Japanese and Indian mountaineers worked together to open the route.

On June 25, the 12th day after commencing the climb, we attempted the summit. Three members comprising Commander S. Dam, Yasushi Tanahashi and myself departed from our attack camp at 3:50 a.m. Unfortunately S. Dam soon had to drop out as he was unable to keep pace with the other two. We reached our previous high point at 8:30 a.m. Every pitch from there was extremely hard, even though it was less than 300m to the summit. We moved steadily pitch by pitch against a strong wind and the clouds that prevailed on the upper part of the south ridge.

About 11 hours after leaving camp we reached a treacherous snow wall. I led this wall, climbing vertical granulated sugar snow that was very difficult to negotiate. We kicked and stamped down the snow to make it more solid but all our efforts were in vain. We continued our struggle as the wall became even more precipitous. The last 30m ended with a cornice. To overcome it, we first had to dig a trench two meters deep and then excavate a tunnel. If conditions as critical as this had carried on for another five minutes, I would have given up and descended. Tanahashi led the final (26th) pitch, which took us to the foot of an ice tower resembling a cream puff. We stood atop Padmanabh at 3:10 p.m. after over 11 hours of continuous climbing.

A few days later Motup Chewang, Rushad Nanavatty, Dr Oe and Tadashi Fukuwada (each of whom worked hard and climbed quite high while preparing the final route) were poised for another attempt on the summit. However, due to the onset of bad weather, they gave up the attempt.

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