

# Saser Kangri

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SASER KANGRI, 25,170 feet, meaning "Yellow Snow Mountain" \* in Ladakhi, lies in the eastern Karakoram, guarded by three satellites, Saser II, III and IV (24,650, 24,560 and 24,330 feet). It has attracted the attention of mountaineers since the last century. Neve, Millais and Tyndale-Biscoe explored the region in 1899 and reached 20,580 feet on a peak east of Panamik. Longstaff climbed to 18,000 feet in 1909 and the Vissers came in 1929. Col J.O.M. Roberts led an expedition there in 1946, Major Nandu Jayal in 1956 and Major Harsh Bahuguna in 1970.

After information was collected and ground reconnaissance made in early 1972, it was decided to discard the conventional route from the Nubra valley side in 1973 and attempt it from the opposite side, from the east, from the Shyok River. This route had been considered almost impossible because the trail crosses the Shyok River continuously; when the weather is favorable for mountaineering, the river swells and submerges the trail. We proposed to make a very early-season start and return by a different route, following the Shyok farther *upstream*. The trip to Base Camp and back would be some 375 miles in all. Due to the early season, the only means of getting to Leh was by air, which we reached on March 30. The next four weeks were utilized for acclimatization, toughening up and advanced training in ice-craft and rock-climbing.

On April 26, after offering prayers in the Gompa, Mandir and Gurudwara, we left Leh for Zingral by vehicle. It took us three days from there to cross the snow-bound Chang La (17,352 feet) and another week of long marches up the sandy, arid Shyok valley. We averaged five to six icy-cold river crossings per day—33 in all—at altitudes from 13,500 to 15,000 feet. Base Camp was at the snout of the North Shukpa Kunchang Glacier at 15,000 feet in a rocky, bare, desolate area where no blade of grass grows. An afternoon snowfall was a regular phenomenon. The nearest habitation was 80 miles away, preventing any local support.

The supply line from Base Camp to the summit was exceptionally long, over 20 miles on the map and about 30 miles as we had to climb. It took three weeks of relentless toil to forge a route through this interminable glacier up to 21,600 feet. The first 2000-foot-high icefall entailed fixing 1000 feet of rope. Camps I, II, III, IV and V were at 16,800,

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\* More exactly it means "Golden Earth Ice Peak": *sa* = earth, *ser* = gold, *gang* = ice, *ri* = peak. —Editor



PLATE 31

*Photos by Jogindar Singh*

**SASER KANGRI from Camp III below  
the first intervening ice wall.**

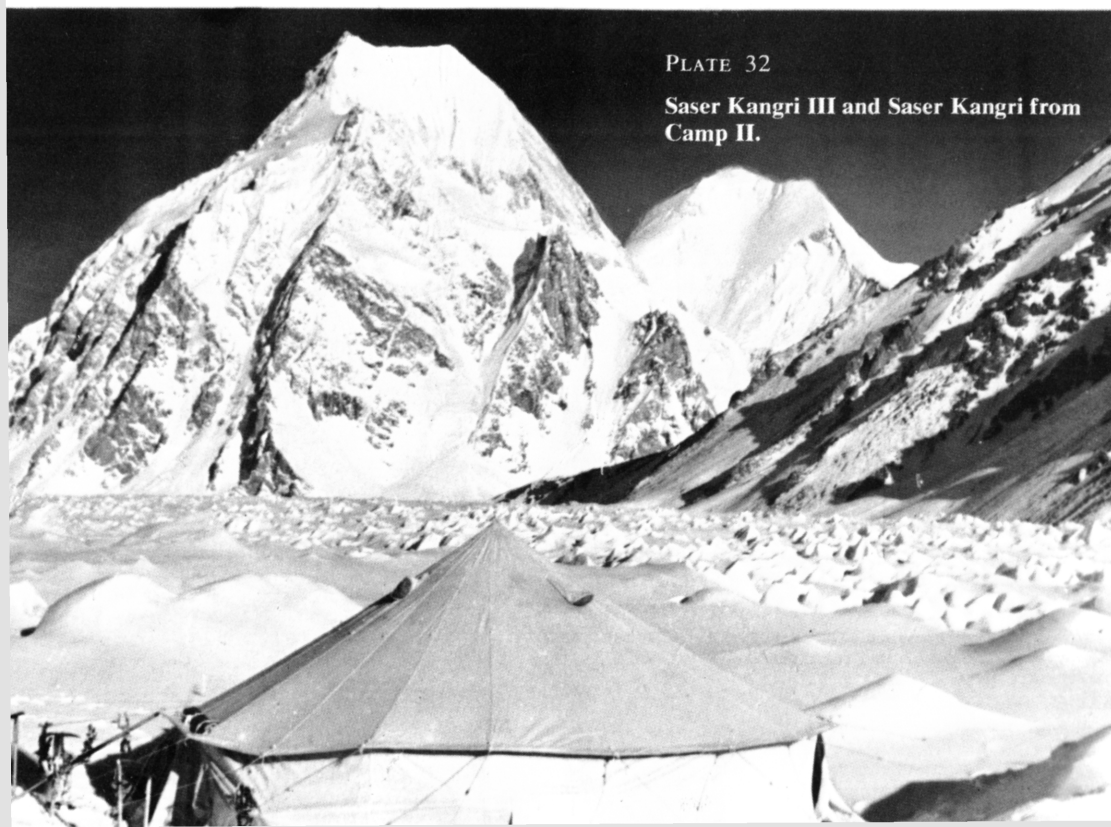


PLATE 32

**Saser Kangri III and Saser Kangri from  
Camp II.**

17,600, 18,600, 20,700 and 21,600 feet. The weather turned bad, forcing our climbers down to lower camps on May 28. When it cleared, they moved up on June 2 to reoccupy the higher camps and come to grips with the mountain. A route was opened through the second very difficult icefall—we used a total of 5000 feet of fixed rope—and Camp VI was established on June 4 at 23,590 feet. On June 5 Dawa Nurbu, Da Tenzing, Nima Tenzing and Thondup left Camp VI. Gale winds at times forced them to move on all fours. They finally reached the summit at 10:45 A.M.

On June 6 Y.C. Khanna, G.S. Bangu, Pemba Tharkey, Roshan Lal, Rinjee, Budhiman and Rabgais followed in their footsteps and reached the summit at 1:20 P.M. On June 7 Mohindar Singh, Sonam Pulzor and Rigzin Mutup paid their homage at the summit. We thanked the Almighty for his indulgence, bowed our heads in silent prayers and withdrew from the mountain.

After retracing our steps to Mandaltang on the Shyok River on June 23, we headed north, opposite to the direction of our approach. We avoided all river crossings but two by climbing the steep, difficult rocks on the bank of the river. We crossed two snow-bound passes north of Saser Kangri, the Saser La (17,480 feet) and the Tulum Puti La (16,635 feet) to reach Thoise. From there, following the traditional route and crossing the snowy Khardung La (18,380 feet), we reached Leh on July 4.

*Summary of Statistics:*

AREA: Eastern Karakoram, Ladakh, India.

FIRST ASCENT: Saser Kangri, 25,170 feet, June 5, 1973 (Dawa Nurbu, Da Tenzing, Nima Tenzing, Thondup); June 6 (Y.C. Khanna, G.S. Bangu, Pemba Tharkey, Roshan Lal, Rinjee, Budhiman, Rabgais): June 7 (Mohindar Singh, Sonam Pulzor, Rigzin Mutup).

*Note:* This expedition, led by Commander Jogindar Singh, made the highest first ascent yet accomplished by an Indian expedition.