

*Mentok I, Third Ascent.* A Japanese expedition led by Susumu Sasaki made the third ascent of Mentok I (6340m). S. Sasaki, M. Kimura, W. Ueno, and Sherpa Palden reached the summit via the east ridge on August 12.

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*Siachen Glacier, Exploration.* We (Harish Kapadia, leader; Vijay Kothari, Cyrus Shroff, Divyesh Muni, Vineeta Muni; Kaivan Mistry; and Captain Ashish Suhag, liaison officer) applied to climb on the Siachen Glacier in 1998. Permits were granted six months later. On July 3, with eight sherpas as support, we slowly moved up the glacier, using three camps over the next seven days. After the third day, we could see several groups of peaks in the northeast, including Afraj (6815m), and the massive Singhi Kangri (7702m), which justified its name (Singhi = difficult). To our immediate east rose the peaks at the edge of the Teram Shehr Plateau. Bullock-Workman had named one of the peaks Laxmi (wife of Vishnu and goddess of wealth). As Lord Vishnu is God of preservation, we chose to give the names of Vishnu to some of the peaks on the Teram Shehr Plateau. The name Teram Shehr is based on a Balti legend and means "destroyed city." We called the highest peak on the plateau Padmanabh (7030m). It is hoped that Vishnu will protect and prevent any further destruction.

A team was to reach Col Italia at the head of the Teram Shehr Glacier, but the prevailing war did not make it feasible to cross the glacier. Throughout our stay we were always aware that we were in a war zone. There were daily artillery firings across and above our route, helicopters were flying and we met soldiers on their way down, tired and haggard. It is a very different playground for the mountaineer.

After four further camps, we neared the head of the glacier. The stupendous walls of Sia Kangri I (7422m) and II (7092m) (formerly known as Hardinge) threatened avalanches, and all camps were placed carefully away from them. Our last camp on the glacier was a little above Bullock and Workman's 1912 "Ridge Camp." Turkestan La (East, 5810m) lay at the head of an eastern valley. On July 20, four of us plus a LO and sherpa left camp by 6:30 a.m. Winding our way through crevasses and up a gentle valley, we were at the la overlooking the Staghar Glacier in two hours. A deep notch in the ridge could be seen to the north. This was the Turkestan La (North) Col, the foot of which was reached by Francis Younghusband in 1889.

On July 22, we started at 6:30 a.m. and walked northward. After passing Faiz (6150m) ("one who is at the top"), a wide bowl opened in front of us. We were faced with the Indira Ridge and a vast panorama. To the north was the main Indira Col (West). After a walk of about two hours, Sherpa Pemba Tsering and I were at the pass and could look down the Urdok Glacier, which led northward to join the Shaksgam River. Several peaks were visible, though Gasherbrum I was unfortunately in clouds. To the north was Chinese Turkestan. We were standing on a major geographical as well as a political divide.

Another part of our team, Vijay Kothari, Kaivan Mistry, Vineeta Muni and Capt. Suhag, climbed toward the Indira Saddle. After a steep slope, they stood on the northern-most point of India and enjoyed similar historic moments. We all gathered at the camp by afternoon.

It had taken us 98 kilometers and 20 days to reach the Indira Col. The glacier rose from 3550 to 5840 meters over a distance of 72 kilometers. Our party returned to the base of the glacier eight days later. The climbing team had already left for Leh.

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