

*Katkar Valley, Skilma Kangri (5,979m), north face and west ridge; Mt. Jules (5,800m), south face.* In late summer Al Boardman, Jane Cooper, Elliot Forge, and I set out to explore the remote Katkar Valley, hoping to reach its head. To reach our lakeside base camp took 12 days and included flights, acclimatization in Leh, car to Padum and then Reru, and two days approach on foot. We bought supplies in Leh and Padum and had them transported by horses. We had a cook, an assistant, and on-call backup in Padum and U.K. From the lake we reconnoitered a hanging valley to the southeast. This was the site of our originally proposed base camp, but we realized that horses would find the steep, rocky approach too difficult. Apparently, yaks would have coped. We then climbed to 5,000m, to discover that the surrounding peaks would require one or two camps above an advanced base. Unfortunately, we had only one spare tent and not enough time.

We ruled out having an advanced base on the southern glacier because of falling rock and ice threatening the approach. Eventually, we settled on another hanging valley farther east, which terminated northeast of the lake and rose southeast to three unclimbed peaks. We established an advanced base at 5,200m and the following day began breaking trail through deep snow. We barely covered one kilometer in two-and-a-half hours. At this point, day 18 of our expedition, morale dropped to a low. Concerns were expressed about time. I realized how difficult it is to find a new mountain, let alone the route. After another day of photography and route-planning, we tackled the middle of the three peaks.

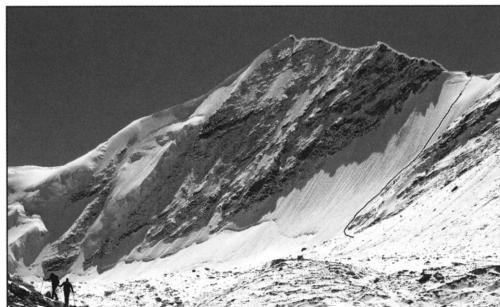
At 2:30 a.m. we set off, retracing our previous tracks. It took only one hour to cover the first kilometer but a further four hours for the next one-and-a-half, through deep powder a skier would envy us for. At the bottom of our intended route a fine avalanche drifted past, missing us but obliterating our path. Had it been 10 minutes before, we would have been in the bergshlund. We had planned to ascend via the right-hand shoulder but found only brittle granite. The shallow gully we'd hoped for didn't appear, so we resigned ourselves to the 400m north face.

We dealt with a mixture of steep ice, deep powder, and compacted snow, sharing the lead and topping out after four hours, calves on fire and the tedium of counting paces finally over. We climbed up the west ridge over compact snow and brittle granite to reach the top at 1 p.m. on September 19. We graded the route D+.

We had to downclimb the face, as there seemed no other way off the mountain. This proved the most unnerving aspect of the day, and we were thoroughly exhausted by the time



Looking south up main Katkar Glacier. (A) R33 (6,128m). (B) R29 (5,817m). (C) R28 (5,944m). Jason Bailey



North face and west ridge of Skilma Kangri. Jason Bailey



Looking southwest from summit of Mt. Jules. (A) Peak 5,860m. (B) Skilma Kangri 5,979m. (C) Unnamed. (D) Peak 35 (6,148m). Only Skilma Kangri is known to have been climbed. *Jason Bailey*

we arrived at advanced base, 14 hours after leaving. We named this peak Skilma Kangri, which means “central snowy mountain.”

Al and Elliott descended to base camp, and Jane came up to advanced base. On the 21st Jane and I scrambled up south-facing snow slopes (F) to summit a peak north of Skilma Kangri, which we named Mt. Jules (5,800m). Views were stunning, more so with the knowledge that no other team had climbed in this area.

JASON BAILEY, U.K.

## LAHAUL

*Peak 6,184m; Trident Peak.* We arrived in Delhi during mid-September and after three days' coach travel reached the village of Darcha on the well-used Manali-Leh military road. Three short days of trekking along the Jankar Nala, northwest of Darcha, got us to base camp (4,300m) in a dry, dusty valley west of the river. Our aim was to attempt peaks a little east of the well-known mountain in this area, Gangstang (6,162m), but our primary objective was Peak 6,184m, a summit previously tried by Japanese in 1999 and 2003, and again in 2008 by an expedition organized by the guide Martin Moran, who also organized our trip. The 2008 expedition attempted the south-southeast ridge, reaching a height of 5,850m, but was stopped by unusually high snowfall.

Toward the end of September we explored the glacier leading to Peak 6,184m and with the help of high-altitude porters established an advanced base at 5,000m. From here it was four hours' walk on easy glacier terrain to the bottom of the south face at 5,585m.



The south face of Saravasti, showing the line of the first ascent.  
*David Bingham*