

INDIAN-JAPANESE EAST KARAKORAM EXPEDITION 2002

First Ascent of Padmanabh 7,030m and Quest of Teram Shehr Ice Plateau

Harish Kapadia and Hiroshi Sakai

PADMANABH : GOD THAT DID NOT FAIL

The expedition consisting of 5 Indian and 5 Japanese mountaineers undertook a long traverse of the Eastern Karakoram valleys for two months and achieved a lot. The team covered almost 550 km (with various repeated load-ferries), carried almost 2500 kg of food, equipment and personal gear (first on 55 mules, later by personal ferries by 11 members and 15 Sherpas and porters) and lived continuously on snow for almost 35 days, braving rather cold temperatures. There were no injuries, accident and or sickness (except to one porter).

The team traversed a 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 a virgin and difficult 7030m high peak of Padmanabh was accomplished.

The team returned via the Siachen Glacier to the Nubra valley. This was the first international team to climb on this war-torn glacier since 1986. These were the first Japanese mountaineers to visit the glacier from the Indian side since the conflict on the Siachen Glacier began in 1984 (many Japanese teams had climbed on the Siachen Glacier between 1972-1983, approaching it from the west).

1 Along the Shyok River to Karakoram Pass

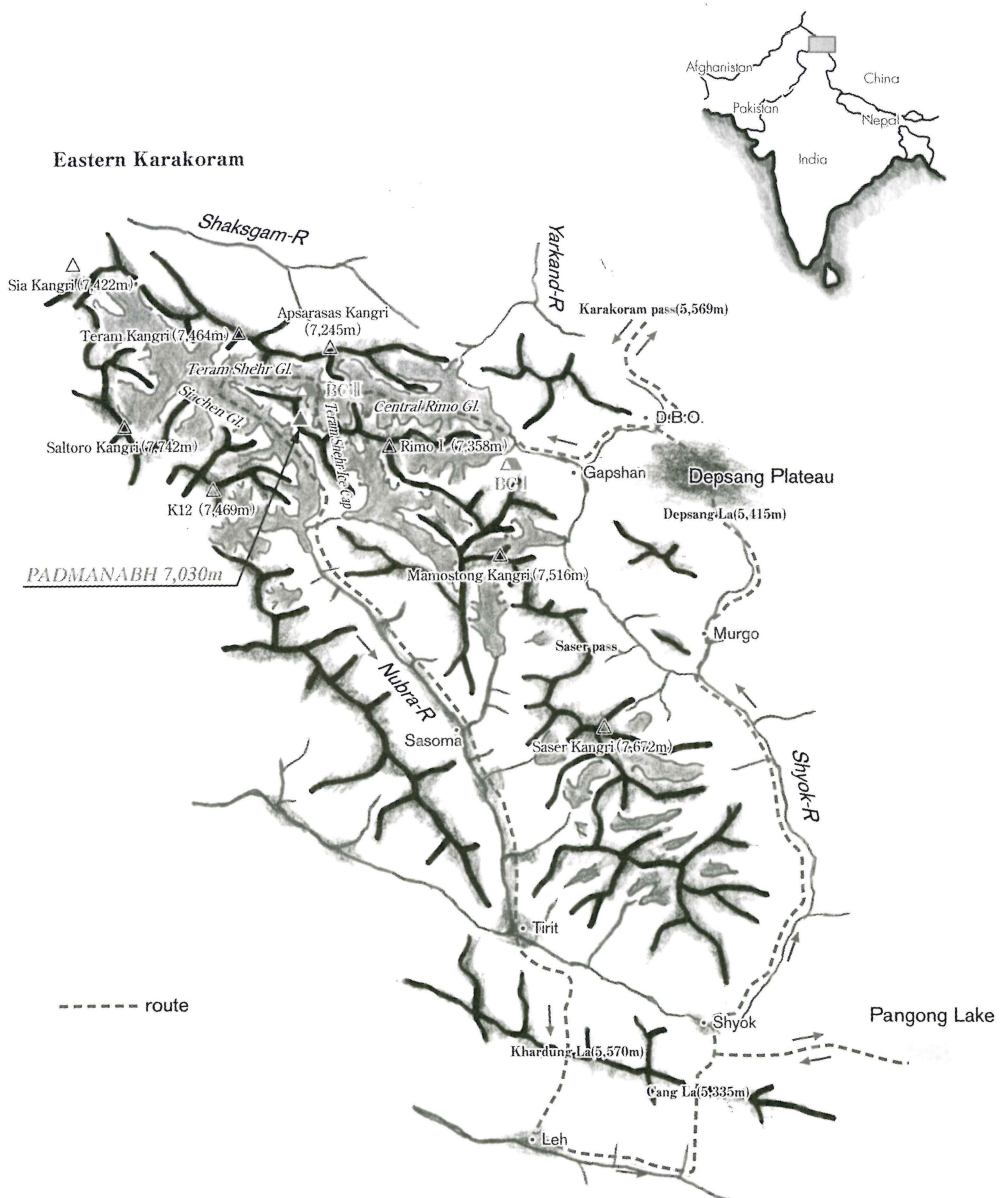
The team gathered at Leh on 11th May 2002, spending next four days in acclimatising. We crossed Chang La (5335 m) to reach Tankse - Darbuk Valley and drove ahead to the Shyok village (3680 m). The village was the only inhabited place that we came across during two months of trek. It is located at the great bend of the Shyok river as it flows in from the southwest and taking a huge turn flows northwest.

The old winter trade route to Karakoram pass passed along the Shyok river. Along this route the Shyok river has to be crossed several times. Thus this route can be used only when water level in the river is low enough to do so and it is possible to go along this route from early November till early May depending on the weather. In next 7 days we trekked along the Shyok river and crossed it for 27 times (each crossing was a challenge as we had to wade through extreme cold, deep and fast flowing water, particularly in the lower reaches) holding hands. The route and the crossings are traditionally known to the muleteers. The expedition baggage, weighing nearly 2500 kilos was carried by 55 mules. We were accompanied by 8 Kumauni, 4 Sherpa and 4 Ladakhi porters as permanent staff for the entire trip.

Starting on 17th of May, we passed Chong jungle (3690 m) to reach Murgo (4550 m) which is on the summer trail to Karakoram which comes across Saser La (full details of daily stages and heights are given at the end). En route we passed the gorges of Chang Chenmo river and the Galwan river in the east and feeding much water into the main Shyok river. Both these gorges are in the east and leads towards the Chinese border. The Galwan river valley witnessed much fighting during the 1962 invasion by the Chinese. The high mountain ridge to the east of this valley contains peaks like Kugrung (6568 m) and this watershed ridge forms the present de facto border between India and China. It was this proximity to the troubled border that had prohibited any trekkers or mountaineers to visit this area for several years. We were the first international team to travel the entire route to Karakoram Pass.

On the left bank of the Shyok river, the British had built a mule trail to keep this route open throughout the year for trade and to avoid the dangerous crossings of the Shyok. We could see traces of this trail at many places, sometimes hewn out of steep rock with dynamite. The trail is now not in use and cannot be traversed.

This trail is a tribute to Rasool Galwan, an Arghon. He was the caravan leader on an expedition with the British Joint Commissioner in 1899. He was part of the team, which reconnoitred possible routes through the Chang Chenmo valley going east from the Shyok river. With the Sahibs, he explored a large unknown river valley little to its north and this valley now bears his name, 'the Galwan valley'. This is a rare instance of a major geographical feature being given the



name of a native explorer who put it on a western map. In 1962, the Chinese troops surrounded the Indian army post in this very Galwan valley and the first shots were fired here to start the Indo-China war.

Galwan had picked up English from his associations with the Sahibs. Encouraged by one of his employers, an American called Robert Barrett, he wrote his autobiography, *Servants of Sahibs*. The book gives a lively insight to life on the caravan, the trail along the Shyok river, towns and areas during those days and about the explorers and their habits.

After Chhumed, on the third day, the trail became easier as water in the Shyok river now onwards was low and could be crossed easily. On the 20th of May we camped at Yurgolak little below an ancient fort which overlooked to the plains of Mandalhang. It is believed that a fort was built here to prevent Mongolian invaders, part of the army of Chengiz Khan invading lower Ladakh. The Shukpa Kunzang valley to the northwest of this fort leads to the Sumur village in the Nubra valley, where another fort of similar nature exists. Between these two forts Ladakhis prevented Mongolian invasions.

On 23rd of May we camped at Sultan Chushku ('the spring of Sultan'). From here we left the main Shyok river which was flowing towards west and then north along the Chong Kundan to Gapshan. As per local advice, it is not possible for horses to use this route before October. We bifurcated along the Murgo nala and joined the summer trail at Murgo. Towards east, several high peaks between 6820 m to 6575 m were seen. These peaks of Kataklik Group would be some of the highest unclimbed peaks in the area.

From Murgo we proceeded along the summer trail to Karakoram Pass. This trail is spectacular but less difficult as it is regularly in use and many difficult passages have bridges or supports. We passed through Kalon Chumik, Kazi Langar and climbed up to Depsang La (5415 m). Here we were received by vehicles of the Indian Army and taken to Track Junction and DBO (Daulat Beg Oldi) for the night. It was an amazing sight looking at this vast plateau at about 5300 m and more so, driving vehicles on it.

28th of May, was an important day for us as we reached the historic Karakoram Pass (5570 m). Our friends were happy to reach the pass, the first Japanese after 93 years, and ours was the first international team permitted to stand on this pass, which is on the India-China border, after the Indian Independence (one British photographer, Paul Harris, had reached the pass in 1997 along with some Indian companions). We looked around the pass and took pictures before returning back. For three of us (Kapadia, Huzefa, Dam) this was the second visit to the Karakoram Pass as we had reached here in the year 2000. Motup Chewang was the third generation of Goba family to reach the pass: his grandfather had crossed it several times for trade and his father stood here many times as part of defence forces – a unique record!

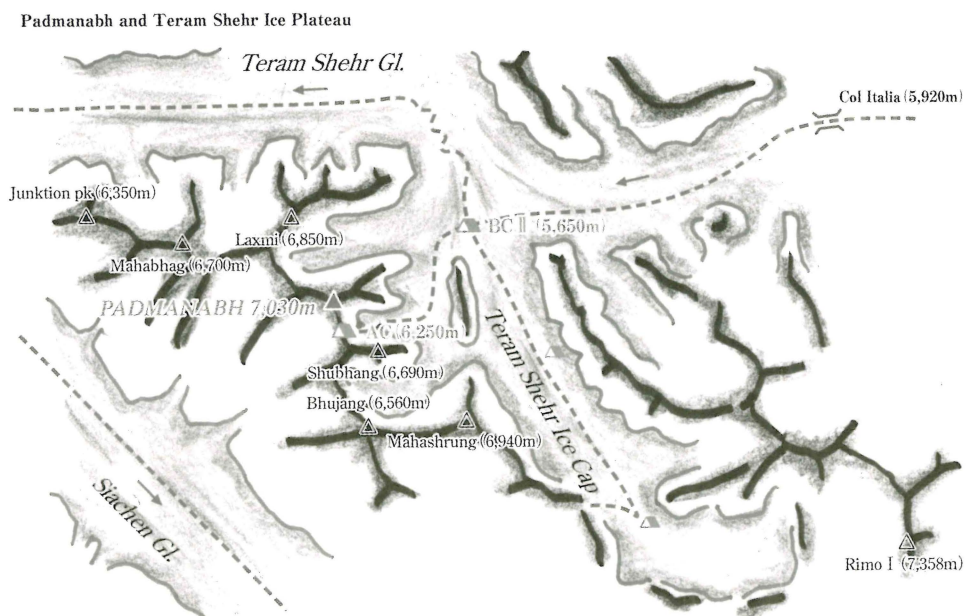
On the way back we halted at the historic site of Polu where ancient mud shelters were discovered. These shelters were built by Yarkandis to take refuge in case of a storm or strong winds. Near these shelters a memorial stone with "Visser 1935" written on it exists as tribute to the early explorations by Dr Ph. C. Visser from the Netherlands. We built another memorial next to it, in same style, in memory of our friend Kaivan Mistry who had visited Karakoram Pass with us in the year 2000 but unfortunately died soon there after, when he fell into the Shyok river on 27th August 2000. It was a fitting addition to the history of this area.

From DBO we travelled to Gapshan and ahead to the Rimo glaciers. On 30th May we established Base Camp 1 (4850 m) next to the moraine of the Central Rimo Glacier. Horses left us and from here everything (almost 2000 kilos) was to be carried between members and the permanent staff.

2 Along the Central Rimo Glacier – Across Col Italia – and the descent of the Teram Shehr Glacier

To cross the Shyok we had come little early in the season and hence now we faced intense cold on the higher reaches of the Karakoram glaciers. All further camps had to be established on snow and members and staff who were to ferry the loads, started around 3 a.m. and returned back after long and tiring ferries by noon to avoid soft snow. We built three camps to reach the foot of Col Italia. We could traverse on the moraine of the Central Rimo Glacier halfway up and beyond that we moved onto snow. We passed near the snout of the North Rimo Glacier, the junction between the two glaciers forming the international boundary between India and China. Camp 4 was set up little before Col Italia at 5750 m. Finally on 15th June, 16 days after we started operating from Base Camp 1, Col Italia, 5920 m, was crossed and we descended the Teram Shehr Glacier in the west. Base Camp 2 (5650 m) was established at foot of the peak Padmanabh. These were the hardest two weeks for the expedition members, as despite inclement weather and soft snow, members, and particularly the staff, carried heavy loads to set up the expedition at foot of our chosen peak.

The Central Rimo Glacier and Col Italia had only a brief history of visitors. Filippo de Filippi, an Italian, explored the Rimo Glaciers in 1913 and studied the area for its geology. With him was young Professor G. Dainelli. Dainelli visited the Siachen Glacier in 1929. While he was on the glacier, the Nubra river was in floods and his retreat down the Siachen Glacier was cut off. With his knowledge of the earlier expedition with Filippi, he climbed up the Teram Shehr Glacier and crossed a high col down the Central Rimo Glacier with almost 400 porters. They returned to civilisation via the summer route across Saser La. He named this high col between the two glaciers as 'Col Italia', after the Italian explorers. In the year 2000, a party of Indians (Kaivan Mistry, Huzefa Electricwala and Harish Kapadia) stood on this pass on 24th August, becoming the



only visitor to this high point, after 71 years. And now after two more years our entire Indian-Japanese team crossed this pass and descended the Teram Shehr Glacier – first crossing of Col Italia after 73 years.

3 The First Exploration of the Teram Shehr Plateau

From Base Camp 2 we had planned explorations and climbs. While the climbing team established a summit camp at 6250 m, two member team of Harish Kapadia and Ryuji Hayashibara with 3 Kumaunis turned south to climb on to the vast Teram Shehr Ice Plateau. This plateau, between from 5650 m to 6250 m is about 16 km long and more than 10 km wide at many places. It is surrounded by high peaks, including Padmanabh (7030 m) and has several deep cols which overlook the Terong Valley in the south and Siachen Glacier in the west. In the east it leads to Col Italia over high cols.

This is a unique feature anywhere in the mountain world and this vast plateau was first seen in photograph of Stephen Venables from Rimo I. In 1985, Muslim Contractor and Jim Fotheringham (of the Siachen Indian-British Expedition, 1985) tried a route from the southern slopes (from Terong valley) to reach the plateau but were unsuccessful. Later the plateau was photographed by other teams but no one had attempted to reach it. The only peak climbed, on the edge of the Teram Shehr Plateau, was Bhujang (6560 m) (Divyesh Muni and Shroff of the Rose expedition, 1998)

Starting from 21st of June, in 3 days Kapadia and Hayashibara reached the upper plateau and visited cols to obtain views and complete the exploration. The upper plateau is surrounded by high peaks, 6862 m, 6854 m or 6855 m and many others of similar heights. A party camping here would have plenty of opportunities to undertake climbs. After four days they returned to Base Camp 2 to join the main team.

4 The First Ascent of Padmanabh

Hiroshi Sakai, as the climbing leader, formed two teams to fix ropes on the south ridge of Padmanabh. The peak rose as a stupendous pinnacle and had a satellite peak towards east. It appeared as a serious challenge from any direction.

On first two days, a team of Tanahashi, Dam, Rushad and Oe fixed ropes for the first 5 pitches over difficult terrain and in some unclear weather. On 21st and 22nd June they were replaced by another team of Sakai, Chewang, Huzefa and Tadashi. They pushed the route much higher and particularly Chewang and Sakai fixed several pitches of ropes to reach up to 6700 m. Everybody gathered on 23rd June at Base Camp 2 to form two summit teams. The first team of Sakai, Tanahashi and Dam established themselves at the high camp on the 24th of June.

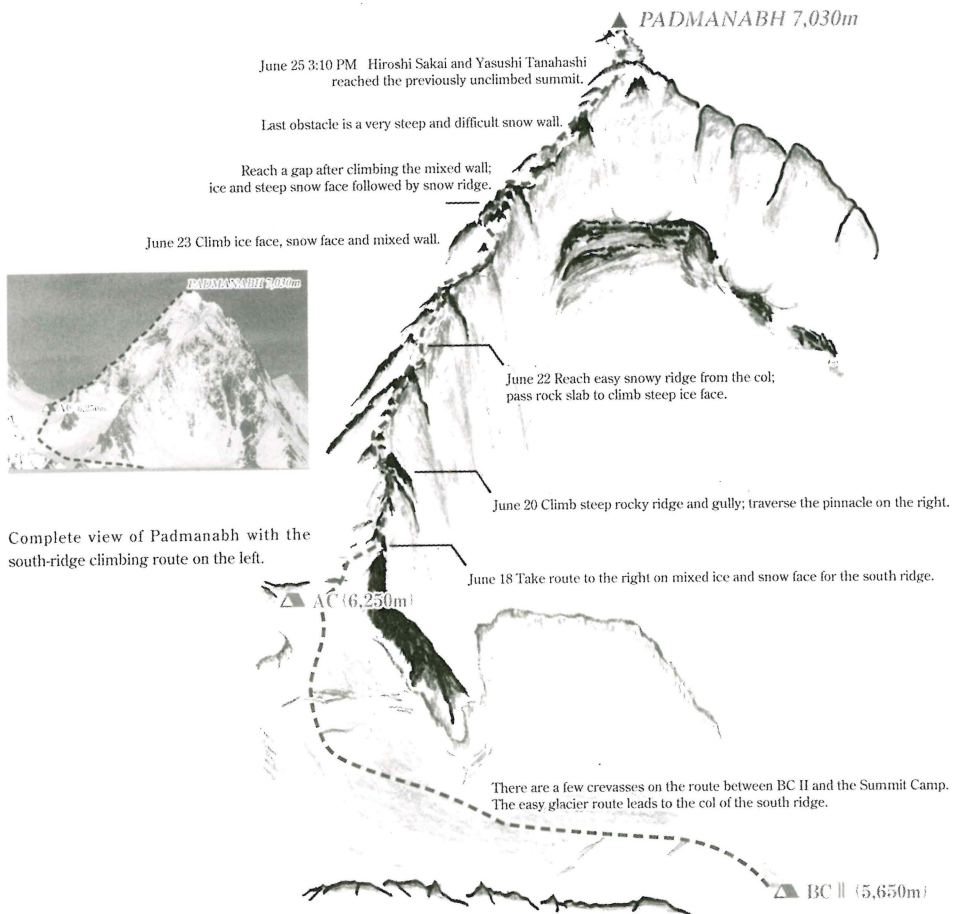
The Ascent - Sakai describes:-

“The period allocated to the climbing was 15 days from a second BC (5650m) back to the same BC. On June 14 an advance party went up along an easy glacier and reached a col on the South Ridge at 6250m. Their reconnaissance led to the conclusion that an attack camp (AC) to assault the summit should be set up near the col. The South Ridge that is chiefly of granite rocks has an average 45 – 50 degree angle of inclination. This angle had us first judge the climbing route would be of lower grade of difficulty. The South Ridge was formed, however, with complicated

small snow ridges appearing one after another upwards intermittently, and in some places between the snow ridges, 70 – 80 degree steep slopes stood in front as if rejecting anyone to challenge. The route paving up to a point at 6750m required the total number of four working days. 16 pitches of ropes were fixed till about 6750m. Two teams consisting of Japanese and Indian mountaineers worked together to open the route.”

“On June 25, we started an attack. Three members of Hiroshi Sakai, Yasushi Tanahashi and Commander S. Dam departed from AC at 03:50am. Unfortunately S. Dam had to drop out soon on the way as his condition got so bad that he was unable to keep pace with the other two. We reached the highest point (6750m) of the route paving at 08:30am. Every pitch from there became next to extremely hard, the height difference to the summit though was only less than 300m. We forwarded our pitches steadily, one by one, against the strong wind and cloud that prevailed over the upper part of the South Ridge. In fact, as the view was lost, we could not identify the terminus of our climbing.”

“About 11 hours after having left AC, we faced with a snow wall treacherously threatening us in the upper part. Sakai led a push from the wall. Snow that covered and adhered to the vertical wall was very difficult to negotiate, as it was like granulated sugar. We kicked the snow to make it go solid, but all our efforts were in vain. We struggled against the deeper snowdrift while the wall was getting more precipitous. The last 30m of the snow wall that we climbed ended with a



cornice. To overcome it, we dug a trench of 2m depth and then a tunnel. If such critical conditions had been carrying on further five minutes, I would have made a decision to give up an advance and descended from there. Tanahashi led the final 26th pitch, which took us to the foot of an ice tower resembling to a cream puff. We stood atop Padmanabh at 03:10pm after a long push of almost 11 hours of continuous climbing.” (Hiroshi Sakai)

Padmanabh was the highest peak on the Teram Shehr plateau and was so named in 1998 by an Indian team trekking on the Siachen glacier. All the peaks surrounding the Teram Shehr plateau are named after Vishnu, the Lord of Protection, and Padmanabh is one of his infinite forms. It was certainly God that did not fail us.

The second summit team of Chewang, Rushad and Dr. Oe was ready to start for the higher camp on 26th of June to attempt the summit the next day. However, a heavy storm which started on the 26th morning stopped thoughts of any further ascent.

5 The Return via the Siachen Glacier

Dam and Huzefa had investigated a safe route through maze of crevasses of the Teram Shehr Glacier from our Base Camp 2. On 27th June we wound up the expedition and descended through that route to reach the moraines of the lower Teram Shehr Glacier. 15 Ladakhi porters specially arranged for us arrived to carry down the bulk of the luggage. We reached the nearest army camp (at 4870 m). No sooner our tired party reached this camp, Col. Sudhir Varni, Commanding Officer, other officers and ranks of 6 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles looked after us well and we relaxed an additional day at this beautiful place. Brig. S. K. Singh, Commander of 102 Infantry Brigade visited us by flying specially in a helicopter. We located the place where in 1911, Fanny Bullock Workman had discovered remains of a Balti village. Over the next three days, a tired party walked down the Siachen Glacier staying at different army camps.

On 1st of July everybody gathered at the snout of the Siachen Glacier and immediately went to a temple to express thanks for a most wonderful and safe expedition. Over a period of more than 50 days, trekking and climbing in most remote terrain, we had no major sickness (except one porter who was sent back to safety to Gapshan army camp) or injuries and we had achieved everything as per schedule, and as planned. In a week we returned to civilization and to our homes in Bombay and in Japan.

Looking at the state of the Siachen Glacier and its damaging environment we were reminded more and more about the need to protect the glacier and end this war.

Team:

- (Indian)** Harish Kapadia (leader), Motup Chewang, Huzefa Electricwala,
Lt. Commander S. Dam and Rushad Nanavatty.
- (Japanese)** Hiroshi Sakai (Deputy Leader), Yasushi Tanahashi, Dr. Hirofumi Oe,
Tadashi Fukuwada and Ryuji Hayashibara.
A liaison officer from the Indian army, Capt. Madhab Boro, 3 Ladakh
Scouts, 102 Infantry Brigade, accompanied the team.
- Period:** 8th May to 9th July 2002.
- Organised by:** The Japanese Alpine Club, Tokyo, Japan
The Mountaineers Bombay, Mumbai, India.

Supplementary Information

Records of Japanese Expeditions in East Karakoram (Siachen, Rimo, Saser)

- 1907 Tsutomu Hino crossed the Karakoram Pass from the north (first Japanese).
- 1908 Zuicho Tachibana and Eizaburo Nomura of Otani Expedition crossed Karakoram Pass from the north.
- 1962 First ascent of Salto Kangri by joint expedition from Kyoto University and Pakistan.
- 1974 First ascent of K12 by Kyoto University expedition.
- 1975 First ascent of Teram Kangri I and II by Shizuoka University expedition.
- 1976 First ascent of Sherpi Kangri by Kobe University expedition.
- do- First ascent of Apsarasas by Osaka University expedition.
- do- First ascent of Shingi Kangri by Tohoku University expedition (reached Col Italia).
- 1978 Kansai Student Mountaineering Federation party climbed Ghent.
- do- Kakujo Alpine Club reached Shiachen Glacier and attempted to climb Rimo.
- 1979 First ascent of Teram Kangri III by Hirosaki University expedition.
- do- "Five Great Glaciers Expeditions" crossed Conway Saddle, Siachen Glacier, Bilafond la.
- 1984 First ascent of Mamostong Kangri by joint expedition from The Himalayan Association of Japan (HAJ) and India.
- 1985 First ascent of Saser Kangri II by joint expedition from HAJ and India.
- 1988 First ascent of Rimo I by joint expedition from HAJ and India.
- 1993 First ascent of Aqtash by joint expedition from Hiroshima Alpine Club and India.
- 2002 First ascent of Padmanabh by joint expedition from The Japanese Alpine Club and India.



Crossing the Shyok River, which later joins the Indus River (Hiroshi Sakai)

(Page—1)



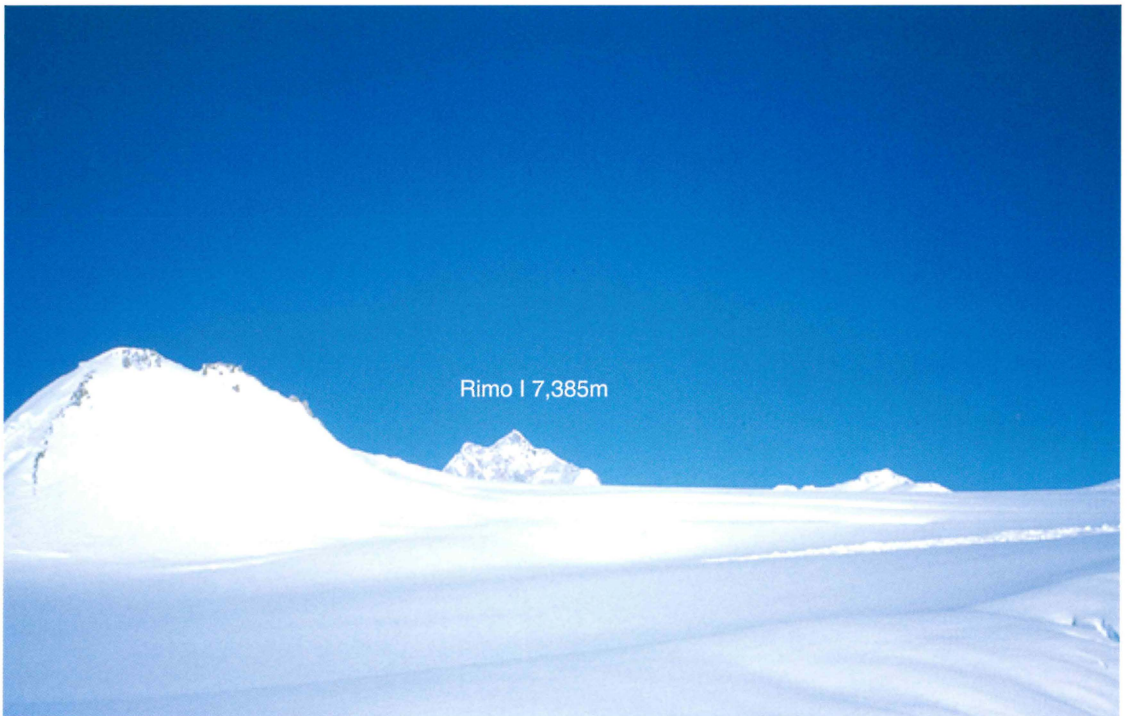
Stood on the historical Karakoram Pass 5,569m (Hiroshi Sakai)

(Page—1)



Padmanabh 7,030m (center), a view to the west after crossing Col Italia (Hiroshi Sakai)

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Teram Shehr Ice Plateau (Ryuji Hayashibara)

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Tanahashi on his way to route paving on the south ridge (Hirofumi Oe) (Page-5)



Padmanabh south ridge from the summit camp 6,250m (Hirofumi Oe)

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A view from Teram Shehr Ice Plateau to Siachen Glacier Left: K12 (7,469m) Right: Saltoro Kangri (7,742m) (Ryuji Hayashibara)
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Teram Shehr Ice Plateau from Rimo I 7,385m (Yoshio Ogata 1988)

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The SE face of Kaqur-Kangri (Toyoji Wada)

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Langlung-Kangri (Toyoji Wada)

(Page-17)



Kanjeroba Himal (Toyoji Wada)

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The south face of Tengi Ragi Tau 6,943m, a view from the top of Parchamo 6,279m

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Route paving on a large steep snow wall of Himalayan fluted snow and ice-
the SE face (Page-24)



The SE Face of Tengi Ragi Tau 6,943m

The photos taken by Toshio Yoshida (Page—45)



Meconopsis horridula, 17 Aug., Dong-da-la; alt. 5,100m



Saussurea laniceps, 23 Aug., near Mt. Dameyon;
alt. 4,750m



Pedicularis likiangensis, 23 Aug., near Mt. Dameyon;
alt. 4,800m