

The Eastern Karakoram

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Plates 2–10

The early explorers knew no boundaries except those of mountain ranges but present day mountaineers and explorers have to respect political boundaries and territorial regulations. Only since 1984 have all the ranges of the E Karakoram been opened to climbers by the Indian Government. At first while planning for the Siachen Indo-British Expedition 1985 to the Terong valley, one felt that the area was not frequented, remote; that information was scarce and approach difficult. However, upon a little research it was found that more than 40 parties had visited the area. Information and various references were scattered over a large number of books and journals. The Karakoram has many opportunities for climbing and exploration and it is bound to receive many mountaineering parties in the future. In early days, caravans from Srinagar to the Siachen snout took nearly 50 days; now it would be but five!

The E Karakoram consists of the Siachen Muztagh, the Rimo Muztagh, and the Saser Muztagh as a sub-group of the Great Karakoram.¹ All these groups consist of various sub-groups and peaks as classified in the Karakoram Conference report of 1936. Out of these the Siachen Muztagh was explored thoroughly, while the Rimo Muztagh and Saser Muztagh received a few parties.

The Siachen Muztagh

The peaks surrounding the Siachen glacier form this group. In 1821, W Moorcroft passed near its snout and first acknowledged its existence.² In 1835 G T Vigne approached it from the west trying to reach the Bilafond la, but he never guessed the existence of such a large glacier across the divide.³ In 1848 Henry Strachey was the first to discover the existence of the Siachen glacier and ascended it for two miles from the snout in the Nubra valley.⁴ In the same year, Dr Thomas Thompson⁵ also reached the glacier followed by F Drew in 1849–50.⁶ E C Ryall of the Survey of India sketched the lower part in 1861. But he ascribed to it a length of only 16 miles. During his famous second Karakoram journey in 1889, Sir Francis Younghusband approached over the Urdok valley to reach the Turkestan la. Looking down to the Siachen from the north he felt that this was the main axis of the Karakoram.⁷ This was finally confirmed by Dr T G Longstaff in 1909.⁸ In fact, it was Dr Longstaff with Dr Arthur Neve and Lt Slingsby who were the first real explorers to traverse this great glacier. First, they came over the Bilafond la (or, Saltoro Pass, as Dr Longstaff would have preferred to call it) and named the opposite glacier as 'Teram' and peaks as Teram Kangri, after a Yarkandi legend: 'The learned men of Balti say that a large town was said to stand at the present site of the Teram Shehr. Yarkandis from this town often crossed to Baltistan to loot cattle and destroy villages. To protect them, Mullah Hazrat Amir gave the villagers a Tawiz (magic amulet) which was placed on the Bilafond la. Soon after, a great

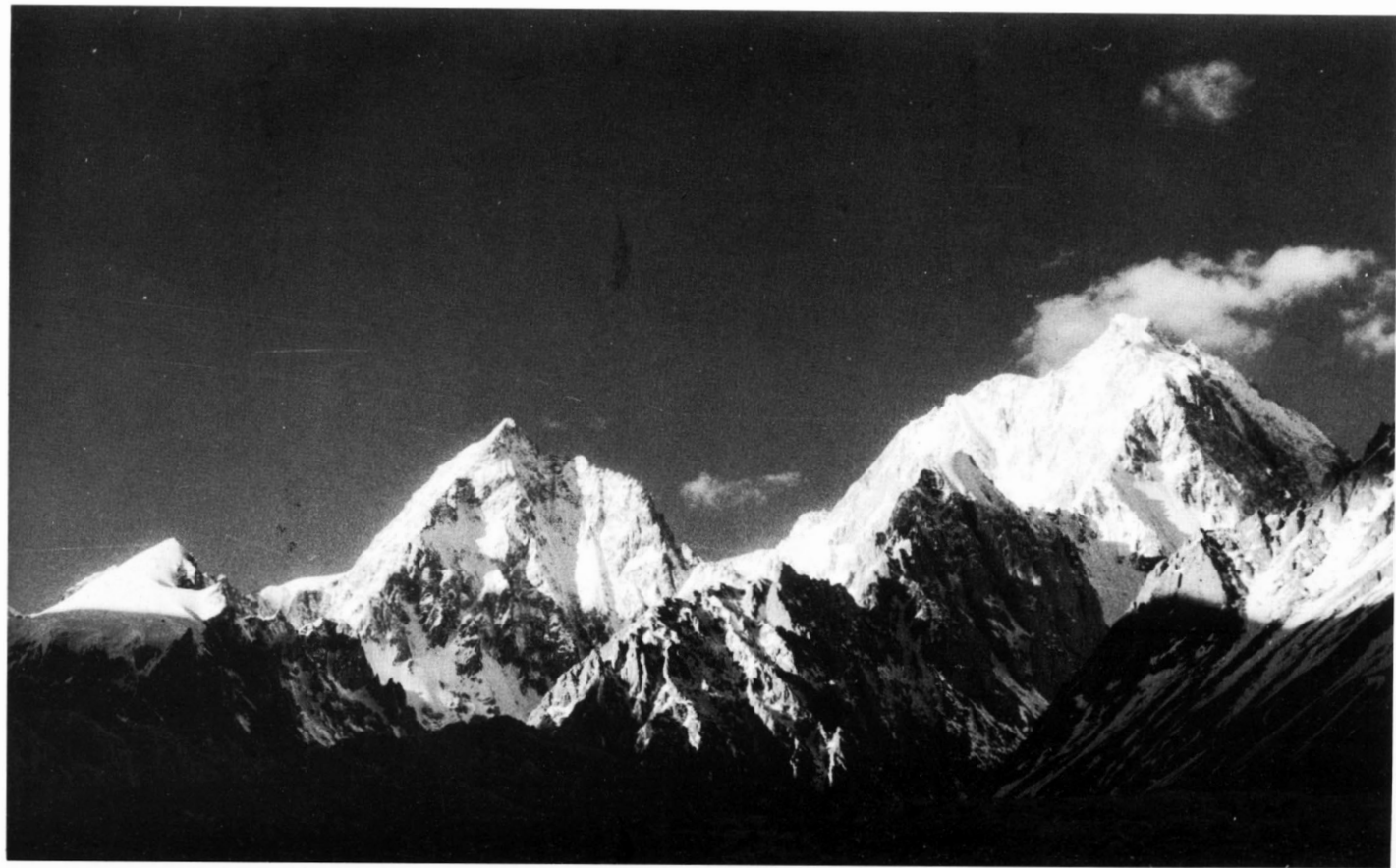
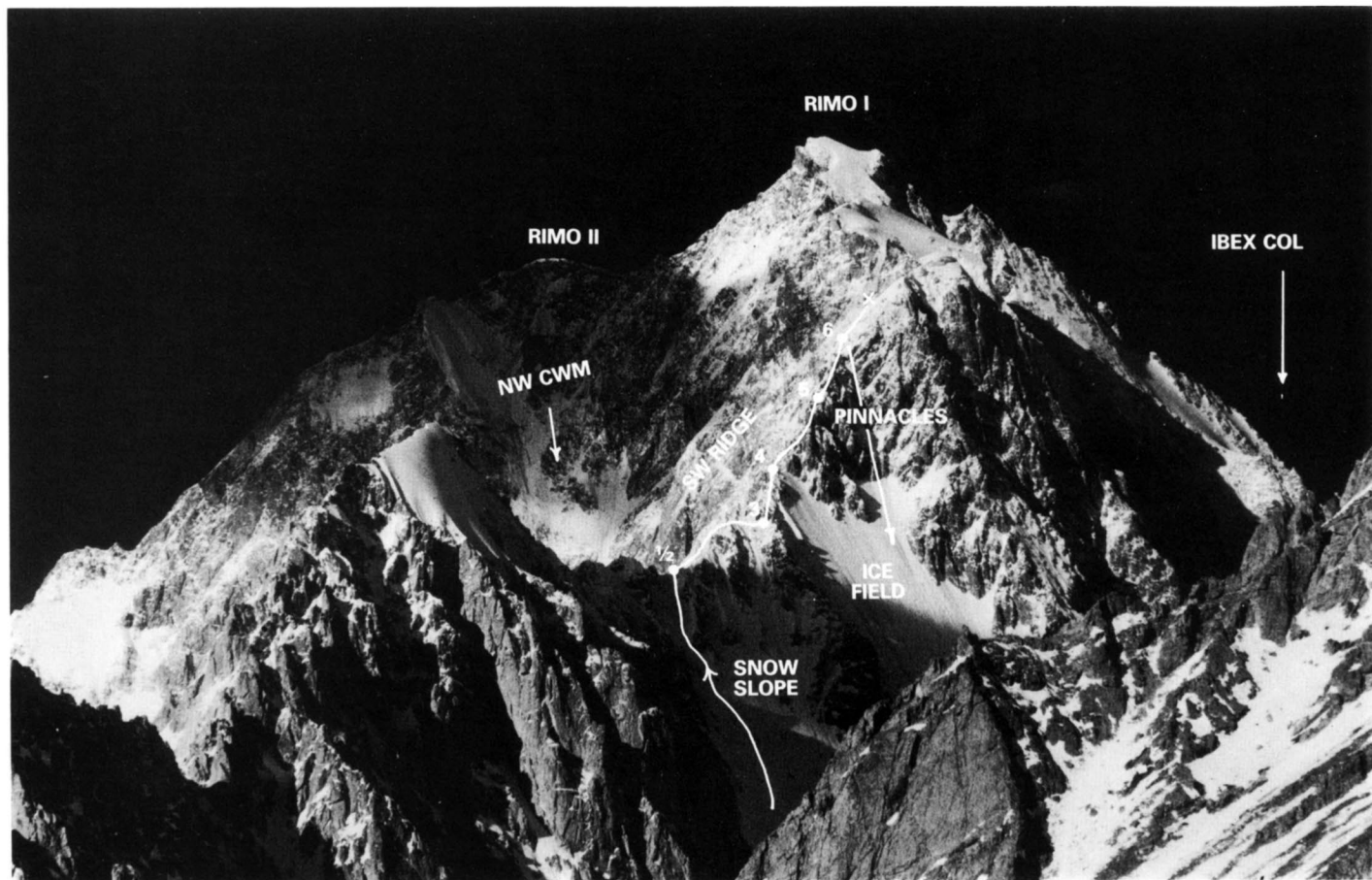


Photo: Stephen Venables

- 2 The Rimo group seen from Advance Base Camp on the N Terong glacier to their south. L to R: Saigat, Rimo III, Rimo II & I. Ibex Col is the notch to the extreme right. The SW ridge of Rimo I descends R to L into the centre of the picture.



3 Telephoto view of Rimo I from ABC showing the route attempted.

Photo: Stephen Venables

storm engulfed Teram Shehr destroying it and today not even grass and burtza would be found to mitigate the rocky desolation of Teram Shehr.’⁹ After retreating to the Nubra valley, Dr Longstaff came up from the Siachen snout from the south and saw the same peaks as identified from the Bilafond la. In doing so he proved the length of Siachen glacier and the actual location of the Turkestan la. This was an important discovery as it now established the true boundaries of the Karakoram. He wrote:

‘Younghusband was a true prophet. Col Burrard of the Survey had suspected the truth. The avalanche-swept pass, whose foot Younghusband had reached 20 years before, was on the main axis of the Karakoram range which thus lay miles farther north than had been believed. We had stolen some 500 sq miles from the Yarkand river system of Chinese Turkestan, and joined it to the waters of the Indus and the Kingdom of Kashmir.’⁸

The next most important explorers were the famous Workman expedition in 1911–12. They entered over the Bilafond la and camped on the glacier with a large entourage of porters and two Alpine guides. They visited and named Indira Col (after Goddess Laxmi — there is a misconception that this col, now the northernmost point of India, is named after India’s late Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi). In a month long survey they climbed many peaks and visited almost all corners of the upper Siachen. Grant Peterkin was a surveyor attached to the expedition. He surveyed the glacier thoroughly and named a few peaks, particularly Apsarasas and Ghent.

In 1929 Dr Ph C Visser of the Netherlands was on his fourth trip to the Karakoram.¹⁵ The advice of Dr Longstaff to them was: ‘When it is desired to survey this unknown corner, will the party please proceed five miles up the Siachen glacier and take the first turning on the right.’ This good advice was taken by the Vissers, they discovered the two Terong glaciers and the Shelkar Chorten glacier which were unknown till then. Dr Rudolf Wyss and surveyor Khan Sahib Afraz Gul stayed in the Terong valley and mapped the area. Thus they completed the survey of the lower part of this great glacier.

At the same time the Duke of Spoleto Expedition crossed the Karakoram by the Muztagh Pass and reached the Indira Col from the north. They descended from the Turkestan la after discovering Staghar and Singhi glaciers. In 1930 Professor Giotto Dainelli completed the survey and exploration of this area. Coming over from the south he established himself at the Teram Shehr junction in early June, ‘. . . thus reaching the Siachen tongue with all my baggage, a caravan of 70 coolies and six and a half tons of food for the men, carried by an additional caravan of ponies and supplementary coolies. On the 9th of June — exactly two months after my departure from Florence — I was heading for my first depot up the glacier. I hope my English colleagues will appreciate this rapidity of execution, which I consider a record!’¹² Compare this with the present timings. Technically one can be at the Siachen snout within three days from Delhi. Dainelli, with his only companion Miss Kalau, stayed at the Teram Shehr junction and carried out various geological surveys. Due to flooding of the Nubra, he could not return by the same route and hence crossed a 6000m pass to the Rimo glaciers in the east. He named this, ‘Col Italia’.

With the Spoleto expedition, the survey and exploration of the Siachen was

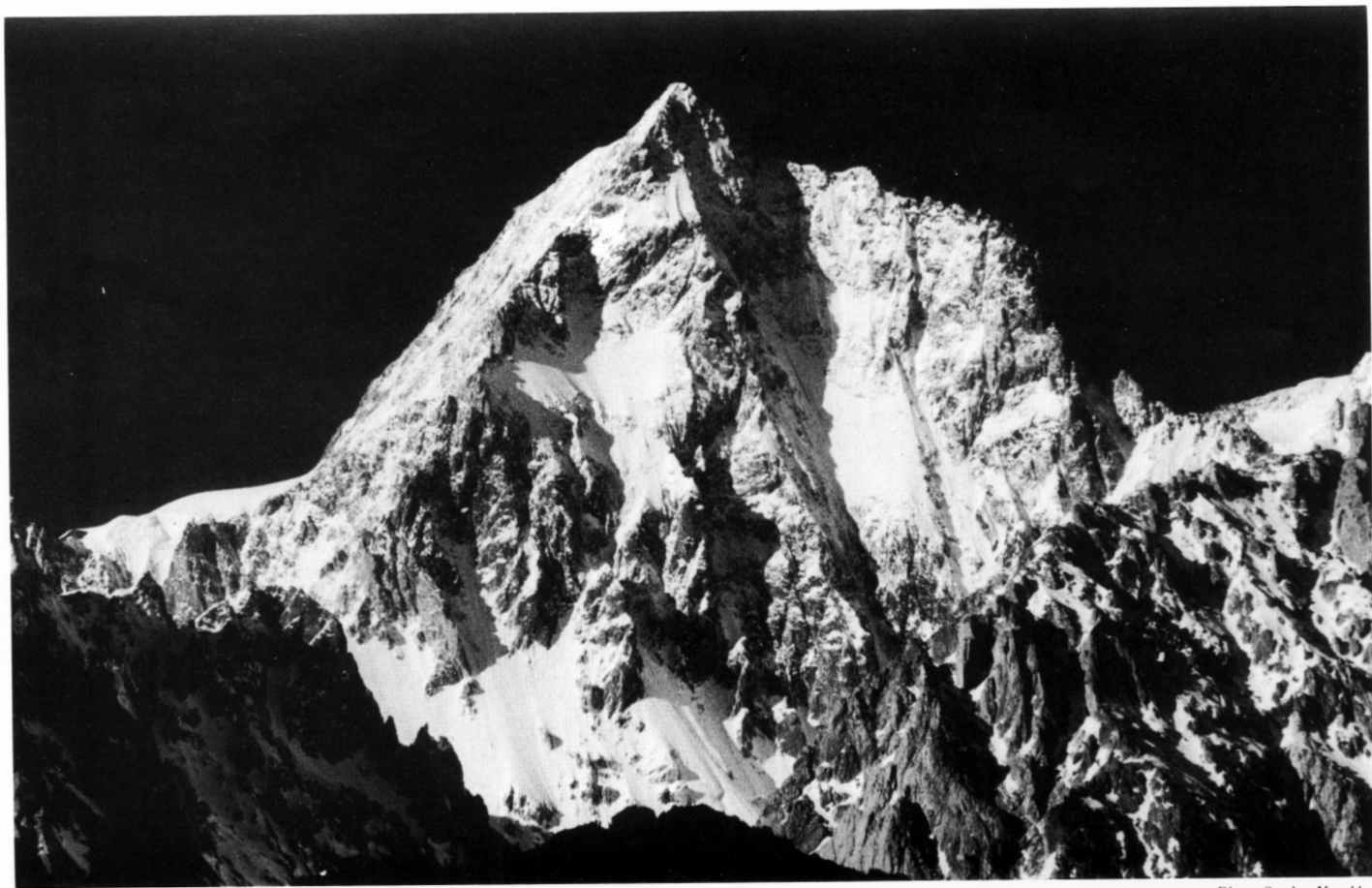


Photo: Stephen Venables

mostly over. It was now left to climbers to attempt the various high peaks in this area. These climbing activities are tabulated at the end of this article. Several expeditions arrived at the Siachen glacier from the west over the Bilafond la or the Sia la. In 1978–80 and 1981, Indian Army teams entered the glacier from the Nubra valley in the south and made excellent ascents. In 1984 a Japanese team approaching Rimo from the west over the Bilafond la was turned back. India had firmly taken control over the area stopping all access from the west and north. Since 1985 this area is selectively open for climbers approaching from Leh and Nubra.

The Rimo Muztagh

The Rimo glacier which is the main source of the Shyok has received very few visitors or climbers. Its end had been only roughly sketched by Johnson in 1864 and Robert Shaw in 1869. The Sir Filippo De Filippi Expedition of 1914 explored this great glacier and its feeders, thereby connecting with the Peterkin survey of 1912. Next came the Indian Army Engineers Expedition, after 70 years, in 1984 which climbed Rimo IV. The Siachen Indo-British Expedition of 1985 crossed over from the Terong valley to climb Rimo III. They narrowly failed on Rimo I. The Terong group (N and S Terong glaciers) and the Shelkar Chorten glacier were also thoroughly explored by this expedition. In all, seven peaks were climbed and various passes and cols reached linking the Siachen/Terong to Rimo/Shyok valleys. They approached from the Siachen glacier thus linking both Muztaghs.

Mamostong Kangri was first explored at close range by Dr A Neve and was surveyed by De Filippi's expedition. This peak was ascended by an Indo-Japanese expedition in 1984 approaching from the south over the Mamostong and Thangman glaciers.

The Saser Muztagh

The Saser Kangri area was first reconnoitered by Arthur Neve in 1899. In 1909 and 1922, the Longstaff and Visser expeditions reconnoitered it respectively. The main reconnaissance was carried out by J O M Roberts in 1946. He reconnoitered all the peaks of Saser and the surrounding area. In 1956 an Indian expedition led by N D Jayal, in 1969 led by C S Nogyal and in 1970 by H V Bahuguna failed to climb this peak reaching high on Cloud Peak. Both Roberts' and Jayal's teams climbed nearby Lookout Peak. The first ascent of Saser Kangri was made by an Indian team led by Joginder Singh in 1973 approaching from the Shyok valley in the east. An Indian Army team led by Col Jagjit Singh made the second ascent of this peak.

All the other groups in this Muztagh have not been visited and await exploration.

Nomenclature of Peaks in the Eastern Karakoram

<i>Name</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Named by</i>
Kharpo Gang	White glacier	Dr U Balestereri of
Staghar	Many coloured	Duke of Spoleto Italian
Singhi	Difficult	Expedition 1929



Photo: Stephen Venables

<i>Name</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Named by</i>
Apsarasas	Apsara = fairy sas = place (place for the fairies)	Grant Peterkin of Bullock Workman Expedition 1911-12
Indira Col	Indira = Goddess Laxmi	
Tawiz	Magic amulet	
Hawk	Shaped like a hawk	
Siachen	Place of roses	
Sia Kangri	Rose Peak	
Ghent	Named after the Treaty of Ghent which terminated hostilities between Great Britain and United States in 1814	
Teram Shehr	Ruined town — as per the Yarkandi legend	Dr T G Longstaff in 1909
Teram Kangri	The peak of ruined town	
Bilafond	Butterfly	
Mamostong Kangri	Mountain of a thousand devils	Ladakhi/Yarkandi
Rimo	Striped mountain	Ladakhi/Yarkandi
Terong	Narrow gorge	Ladakhi/Tibetan
Saser Kangri	Yellow mountain	Ladakhi

Nomenclature in the Terong Valley: The Names Proposed by the Siachen Indo-British Expedition 1985.

'The nomenclature of a mountain region should not be forced: it should grow spontaneously, and we should never invent a name until its absence has become inconvenient.' So wrote Col Sir Sidney Burrard who, in 1906, was Superintendent of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India (*Hj10*, p86). Climbing in an area with many unnamed peaks and valleys, it *was* inconvenient to refer to them just by numbers and heights and we have proposed the following names to the Survey of India. These are in line with the guidelines given by the Survey of India in 'Himalayan Nomenclature', *Hj31*, p334.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Sundbrar	A beautiful place.
Sondhi	A sudden beautiful appearance. There is a place by the name of Sundbrar in Baltistan. Kashmiri Brahmins and Hindus along with several thousand people used to gather at this place on a certain day in June. They would worship the Hindu Goddess Laxmi and wait for the rising of water praying for it to appear. At an appointed time a stream would fill the basin and the multitude would shout — 'Sondhi'. Above all, this phenomenon portrays the prevalence of the Hindu rituals deep inside the Muslim Baltistan (See <i>Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladak</i> , 1890, p801).



6 The Rimo group from 'Crystal Camp' on the S Rimo glacier. L to R: Rimo I & II, Rimo III, Rimo IV.

Photo: David Wilkinson

<i>Name</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Lharimo	Holy, painted mountain.
Doab	Meeting place of two waters.
Safina	Boat. In Balti philosophy this is a special boat which carries one to heaven.
Saigat	Leopard's leap. This peak particularly tilts (leaps) towards the giant Rimo peaks.
Chorten	The Buddhist symbol.
Ngabong Terong	Ngabong = Bactrian camel — the double-humped camel of Yarkand. A few are still seen in the Nubra valley.
Siab Chushku	Siab = meeting place of three waters (North and South Terong and Shelkar Chorten glaciers). Chushku = temporary camp.
Doab Chushku	Temporary camp at meeting place of two waters.

History of the Siachen Muztagh 1821–1885

<i>Year</i>	<i>Expedition</i>	<i>Reference</i>
1821	W Moorcroft passed near the snout and reported existence.	2
1835	G T Vigne approached it from W over Bilafond la but never guessed its existence.	3
1848	Henry Strachey discovered the existence of Siachen glacier and ascended it for two miles.	4
1848	Dr T Thompson visited the snout.	5
1849–50	F Drew approached the glacier.	6
1862	E C Ryall, Survey of India, sketched the lower part and ascribed it a length of only 16 miles.	
1889	Sir F Younghusband reached Turkestan la from the north and looked down on the glacier.	7
1907	Sir Sidney Burrard published a map on the Himalaya. It did not include Siachen though he mentioned possibility of a large glacier.	14
1908	Dr Arthur Neve and D G Oliver reached the snout and explored Mamostong Kangri.	10 35
1909	Dr Tom Longstaff, Dr Arthur Neve and Lt A M Slingsby, later joined by Capt D G Oliver first came over Bilafond la and later over the Siachen snout to establish the length of the Siachen glacier and exact location of various passes.	8
1911–12	The Workman Expedition coming from the west, named many peaks and passes and climbed a few peaks. Grant Peterkin surveyed the glacier thoroughly.	9
1911	V D B Collins and C S McInnes of Survey of India, surveyed Teram Kangri and other peaks.	10



7 Rimo IV seen from Rimo III.

Photo: Jim Fotheringham

<i>Year</i>	<i>Expedition</i>	<i>Reference</i>
1913-14	Sir Filippo De Filippi surveyed Rimo glacier system and published a map.	13
1929	Dr Ph C Visser, Netherland Expedition, surveyed Terong valleys and crossed the snout to Gyong la.	15
1929	Duke of Spoleto Expedition reached Indira Col from the north and discovered Staghar and Singhi glaciers.	11
1930	G Dainelli, Italian expedition, stayed two months at Teram Shehr junction and crossed Col Italia.	12
1934	G O Dyhrenfurth, International expedition, made first ascent of Sia Kangri.	18
1935	British Expedition led by J Waller with John Hunt attempted Saltoro Kangri.	19
1939	Lt Peter Young visited Gyong la on shikar.	16
1956	Austrian Expedition led by F Moravec climbed Sia Kangri W.	20
1957	Imperial College British Expedition led by Eric Shipton climbed Tawiz and visited passes.	21
1961	Austrian Expedition led by E Waschak made first ascent of Ghent.	22
1962	Japanese-Pakistan Expedition led by T Shidei made first ascent of Saltoro Kangri I.	23
1974	Japanese Expedition led by T Tanaka attempted Sherpi Kangri II via S ridge.	24
1974	Austrian Expedition led by W Stefan climbed Sia Kangri from SW.	24 25
1974	Japanese Expedition led by G Iwatsubo approached K12 from W. Two members reached the summit but died on the return without any trace.	24
1975	British expedition led by D Alcock attempted Sherpi Kangri.	
1975	Japanese expedition led by Y Yamamoto climbed K12 by the same route to search for the missing summitters. The search failed.	24
1975	Japanese expedition led by H Katayama made first ascents of Teram Kangri I and II coming over Bilafond la.	24
1975	Japanese expedition led by S Yamamoto attempted Saltoro Kangri I.	24
1976	Japanese expedition made first ascent by Sherpi Kangri led by H Hirai.	26
1976	Japanese expedition led by H Misawa made first ascent of Apsarasas I.	27
1976	Japanese expedition led by H Sato came over Bilafond la, crossed Turkestan la and made the first ascent of Singhi Kangri from N.	27



8 Safina Peak (5975m) above the Sondhi icefall.

Photo: Harish Kapadia

<i>Year</i>	<i>Expedition</i>	<i>Reference</i>
1976	An Austrian expedition led by Gunther Schutz came over Bilafond la and attempted Salto Kangri II.	27
1977	Austrian expedition climbed Ghent NE from Kondus glacier.	27
1978	Indian Army expedition led by Col N Kumar approached from Nubra and climbed Teram Kangri II.	28
1978	Japanese expedition led by H Kobayashi climbed Ghent NE from the Kondus glacier.	29
1979	Japanese expedition led by S Hanada came over Bilafond la and made first ascent of Teram Kangri III.	29
1979	Japanese expedition led by R Hayashibara climbed Sia Kangri from Conway Saddle, descended S face to Siachen glacier and trekked out via Bilafond la.	29
1980	Indian Army expedition led by Brig K N Thadani climbed Apsarasas I.	30
1980	West German team led by B Scherzer climbed Ghent.	31
1981	Dutch expedition attempted Salto Kangri II from W.	32
1981	Indian Army expedition led by Col Kumar coming via Nubra, climbed Salto Kangri II, Sia Kangri I, reached Indira Col, Sia la, Turkestan la and Pk36 glacier pass.	33
1983	Trekking parties over Bilafond la from W.	
1984	Indian Army expedition led by Col Prem Chand climbed K12 from Siachen glacier traversing from W.	34
1985	Indo-British expedition led by Harish Kapadia explored and climbed peaks in Terong group. They approached from Siachen, climbed Rimo III and attempted Rimo I.	

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Photo: Dhiren Toolsides

- 9 East Karakoram panorama from the summit of Sondhi. L to R: K12, Pk 6330m (N Terong), Saltoro Kangri I & II, Ghent, Ghent NE.



Photo: Stephen Venables

- 10 Looking ESE from Chorten. Chong Kumdan I & II on horizon (L), Mamastong Kangri (centre).

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HJ — *Himalayan Journal*

HCNL — *Himalayan Club News Letter*

AAJ — *American Alpine Journal*