

Ten minutes after news of the pair's success was communicated from the summit to basecamp, Agnieszka Bielecka got a radio message from Gerfried Göschl's team to say they were camped about 300m below the summit and preparing to set off. Making the summit bid Göschl himself, Swiss aspirant guide Cedric Hahlen, and Nisar Hussain Sadpara, one of three professional Pakistani mountaineers to have climbed all five Karakoram 8000ers. None of them was heard from or seen again.

Adam Bielecki and Janusz Golab had reached the 8068m top of Gasherbrum I at 8.30am on 9 March; their novel tactic for winter high altitude climbing of leaving camp at midnight had worked. But the weather window was about to close. They descended speedily but with great care, reaching camp III at 1pm, by which time the weather had seriously deteriorated. Pressing on, they arrived at Camp II at about 5pm, 'slightly frostbitten and very happy'.



The Polish Gasherbrum team. (Adam Bielecki)

Aviation was able to fly to 7000m and study the route. No trace of the three missing climbers could be seen.

The helicopter landed at basecamp and ferried Adam Bielecki and Golab to Skardu for treatment to their frostbite. The rest of the Polish expedition team left basecamp on 16 March and reached Skardu five days later. As this article was being prepared, the next stage of the Polish Alpine Club's programme was underway, with another winter attempt on Broad Peak. Adam Bielecki was again on the team, led by another Himalayan veteran, Krzysztof Wielicki, with Artur Hajzer coordinating the expedition from Poland.

Summary: An account of the first winter ascent of Gasherbrum I (8068m). The successful expedition was led by Artur Hajzer, with Adam Bielecki and Janusz Golab reaching the summit on 9 March 2012 via the summer 'normal' route of the Japanese Couloir. Hajzer (51) died on Gasherbrum I on 7 July 2013.

On 10 March all four members of the Polish team reached basecamp; both summiteers were suffering from second-degree frostbite, Adam Bielecki to his nose and feet, Janusz Golab to his nose. With concern mounting for Göschl, Hahlen and Nisar Hussain, a rescue helicopter was called, however poor weather stalled any flights until the 15th when Askari

SIMON YEARSLEY, MALCOLM BASS
& RACHEL ANTILL

Three Visions of Rimo III



Rachel Antill, *Rimo III*, 2012, watercolour, chinagraph crayon and pencil, 25x12cm.

In August and September 2012 an Indo-British expedition attempted the south-west face of Rimo III in the Indian East Karakoram. This area had remained closed to foreign expeditions for many years, and has a history of exploration dominated since the early 1980s by the world's most significant high altitude conflict.

The team was unsuccessful on Rimo III but did make the first ascent of an unclimbed 6365m peak that they named Dungleung Kangri. The expedition included a resident artist.

The following article is in three sections: an overview of the geography and history of the area, an account of the first ascent of Dungleung Kangri, and observations from Rachel Antill, the expedition artist.

Overview of geography and history – Simon Yearsley

In many ways we are lucky in the game we call mountaineering. Yes we have the occasional squalid bivouac; yes we put ourselves in difficult and often life-threatening situations in mountain environments... but let's face it, we do choose to put ourselves in these situations. We're not forced or ordered to, and it's only the mountains we face, not fellow human beings who are trying to kill us.



Norbu the cook crossing the Terong river. (Rachel Antill)

So, in comparison to the 60 troops from the Indian Army's 3rd Gorkha Rifles desperately trying to muffle the sounds of their jumaring up fixed ropes in full battle kit, and to the Pakistani troops dug in in the Quaid e-Azam post above them on that cold clear morning of 26 June 1987, we are lucky. For what followed for these troops was one of the fiercest battles of the Siachen Conflict as the Indian forces tried to capture a Pakistani observation post high above the strategically important pass of Bilafond La. This was desperate hand-to-hand combat in freezing temperatures at 6447m. This was a deadly hand grenade exchange. This was a bloody fire-fight lasting more than two hours. Dozens were killed on either side.

The battle was one of many such fierce encounters between India and Pakistan in the complex and long-running Siachen Conflict. This conflict has also by definition played a major

part in the more recent history of this fascinating, and relatively less-travelled mountain area, the Eastern Karakoram.

The Eastern Karakoram comprises three main mountain groups, the Siachen, Rimo and Saser, with the main Siachen glacier a massive 76km long – the second longest glacier outside the polar regions. The head of the glacier forms the northernmost point of India, with Sia Kangri (7442m) the dominant mountain, and the Baltoro glacier and the Gasherbrum group only a few kilometres away to the east. From here it flows south-east with the Siachen group on its northern and western sides, and the Rimo and then Saser groups on its eastern side.

The early exploration followed a pattern common to many Karakoram areas. During the latter part of the 19th century, explorers playing out the 'Great Game' had noted the possibility of the existence of this huge glacial monster. Then from 1909 to the early 1930s a series of expeditions carried out the main surveying work: the irrepressible Tom Longstaff establishing



Basecamp with the Rimo group beyond. (Rachel Antill)

the true length of the glacier, then the New England-born Fanny Bullock Workman and her husband Dr William Workman spending many months on the main Siachen glacier continuing the surveying, naming many of the main peaks, and climbing a few smaller ones. Other exploratory expeditions followed, with the main phase of mapping being completed in 1929 and 1930, Sir Filippo de Filippi surveying the Rimo glaciers on the eastern edge of the range, and the Dutch Dr Visser expedition exploring the important Terong glacier, giving access to the Rimo group from the west.

Usually, with the peeling back of the geography, climbing expeditions soon follow, but in this case over the next 40 or so years there were only a handful of expeditions to the area. From partition in 1947 onwards, the increasing political strains between India and Pakistan, and eruption of hostilities at various points, never made this a straightforward area to visit. This was especially so as the border between the two countries had never been successfully defined. As part of the peace agreement after the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War, the Simla Agreement was signed. This defined the border between the two countries, up to a grid point west of the confluence of the Shyok and Nubra valleys. From this point it was felt there was no need to define it with such precision, and the ambiguous words '...thence north to the glaciers' was used in the text of the agreement. The Pakistani interpretation of this was that the border continued north-east to the Karakoram Pass, the Indian interpretation was that it followed the crest of the mountain chain (the 'Saltoro ridge') forming the west boundary of the Siachen glacier, northwards to Indira Col. The difference was approxi-



Rimo III. The stunning 1600m south-west face remains unclimbed. (*Rachel Antill*)

mately 4000 square kilometres of mountains.

This difference of opinion was important in the next wave of exploration. From 1974 to the early 1980s the Pakistani authorities granted permission for a series of mainly Japanese expeditions to attempt peaks in the Siachen and Rimo areas, with access being gained from the western (Pakistan) areas via the Bilafond La. These expeditions were largely successful, with ascents of K12 (7428m), Teram Kangri I and II (7454m and 7407m) and the enigmatic Apsarasas I (7245m) amongst others.

By the early 1980s the Indian government realised that its claim to the area was being undermined by the Pakistan-authorized expeditions and it started to embark on its own ventures, with Indian Army ascents of Apsarasas I, Saltoro Kangri I (7742) and K12. The Indian government then decided on much tougher military action to assert its control of these mountain areas, and in April 1984 launched Operation Meghdoot. This huge military operation involved tens of thousands of troops occupying the whole Siachen glacier basin up to (and including most of) the Saltoro ridge and also preventing access to the Rimo and Saser groups. From 1984 to a ceasefire in 2003 the Siachen Conflict raged on. The main front line of the Saltoro ridge was the scene of many major engagements, including battalion-sized attacks on high-altitude observation posts, guided missile strikes and regular sniper exchanges. There were also battles further afield in the Shyok valley, and daily shelling of the Indian-controlled Siachen glacier and the Pakistan-controlled glaciers to the west. The Siachen Conflict has been the most significant military campaign ever fought at high altitude.

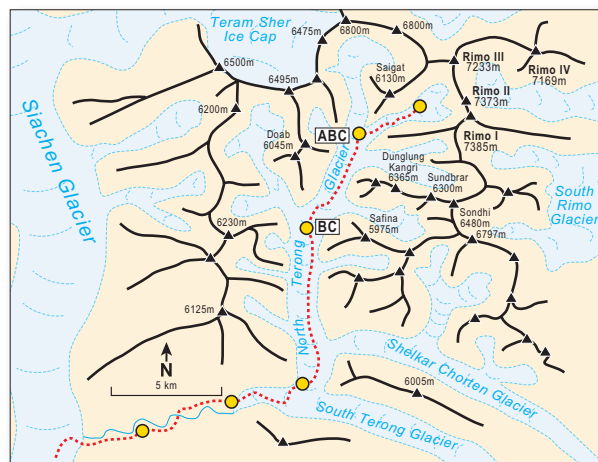
Immediately after Operation Meghdoot, the Indian authorities gave permission for a number of joint expeditions to visit the remote Rimo group, but approaching via the Terong glacier, a side valley off the main Siachen glacier. The 1985 Indo-British expedition that attempted Rimo I (7385m) was thwarted by the infamous 'Venables dropped rucksack', but did see the first ascent of Rimo III (7233m) by Dave Wilkinson and Jim Fotheringham after a bold journey



Looking to the head of the North Terong glacier from advanced basecamp. (*Rachel Antill*)

around the other side of the mountain to approach from the north-east. Rimo I was climbed in 1988 by an Indo-Japanese team, and in 1989 Doug Scott and Sonam Paljor led an Indo-British team to the Rimo group. They climbed Rimo II (7373m), made the second ascent of Rimo IV and had their eyes firmly fixed on the inspiring south face of Rimo III before the expedition was called off prematurely.

The Rimo group effectively remained off-limits for many years. Several foreign teams tried to get permission but without success, and even the renowned Harish Kapadia had permission for his 1996 expedition cancelled just as they were about to enter the Terong valley.



Sketch map of the Rimo area. (Simon Yearsley after Harish Kapadia)

In autumn 2011 we decided that we would try to get permission for the south face of Rimo III. The pictures in Doug Scott's *Himalayan Mountaineer* had inspired us, and we were fortunate that our friend Satyabrata Dam agreed to be the Indian leader of what would need to be a joint Indo-British expedition. We held little hope of getting the permission, but sometimes the timing is just right. Much to our surprise we received encouraging noises from the Indian Mountaineering Foundation and to our amazement on 18 May 2012 we received our X-Visa clearance letter from the IMF.

We were honoured to have been given permission to climb in such a complex and still sensitive area. The journey into the Siachen area and the Terong valley went smoothly, despite a serious river-crossing which nearly stopped us in our tracks. We were fortunate that an Indian Army team who were attempting Rimo I had already constructed a very useful tyrolean across the raging torrent. Future expeditions take note – crossing the Terong river is serious, and could be the crux of any route! We then took the north branch of the Terong glacier and set up basecamp at 4950m on 22 August, with one of the most beautiful views from a basecamp I've ever seen – straight ahead was the stunning 1600m south-west face of Rimo III.



Malcolm Bass finding a way through the crevasses under Rimo III. (Simon Yearsley)

First ascent of Dunglung Kangri – Malcolm Bass

It was over. The massed banks of cloud to the south had decreed that it was over. The relentless snow falling in the upper cwm was insisting that it was over. The waves of spindrift pouring down the shrouded face were hissing that it was over. And all around avalanches were thundering that it was over. It was over.

But we still thought we had a chance. Huddled beneath the dripping tarpaulin roof of the kitchen shelter we clung to the fantasy that the weather would clear and we'd get back on the face. Too hard to let go with so much money spent, so much asked of loved ones, and so many duties shirked. We clung too to our barren, boulder-strewn ABC, making for hard living in the cloud, rain and snow. Hard for Pemba and Ramesh to cook in the tiny kitchen shelter, hard for Thinless and Tashi to keep the camp supplied, hard for Satya to explore, hard for Rachel to paint, and hard for Paul, Simon, and me to wait, through days of books and tea, for something to change.

Our attempt on the face, many days ago now, had been going so well. We'd been 400m up the face, moving smoothly through the night beneath a massive moon. Light sacs and good acclimatisation in our favour: hard, brittle ice against. The photos show us smiling; I remember the excitement of noticing we were above the sidewalls of the cwm. Then, down valley,



Paul Figg on one of the rock ribs on the south-west face of Dunglung Kangri. (Malcolm Bass)



Paul and Simon in the second couloir on the south-west face of Dunglung Kangri. (Malcolm Bass)

the stars had started going out. Half an hour later the snow had begun, and as we were climbing up a giant funnelling feature and had a kilometre of face above us, we'd had no choice but to go down. We'd left our kit in a little tent in the cwm below the face and then, confident we'd be back in a couple of days, dropped back down to advance basecamp to wait for a change in the weather.



Paul and Simon on loose mixed ground on the south-west face of Dunglung Kangri. (Malcolm Bass)

And still we waited. And still nothing changed. The sky that of a late November afternoon in England. Ploughed fields of moraine. Sleet. Rain. Transient illuminations in shades of pink. Each day running its short course till all the days were gone.

And so, in the end, we did go back up to our little tent beneath the coveted south-west face of Rimo III. Not to climb, but to collect the gear we had left there. Two inches of tent fabric stood proud of the drift and showed us where to dig. In one sense we lost nothing.

After retrieving the tent and gear we abandoned ABC and walked back to the relative comforts of basecamp with our heads down. When nothing has been achieved up high, the return to softer living in lower places is at once both sweet and cloying. But although it wasn't what we wanted, some softness was just what we needed. The next day was warm and we lounged in the sun drinking morning coffee amongst our drying kit. There was an air of kindness in the two camps, ours and the Indian Rimo I Expedition next door. Our jaws relaxed, and our eyes, long narrowed in frowns, opened wide again. We could see that there were unclimbed mountains all around. And we still had three days.

The peak on the west end of Sondhi/Sundbrar ridge beckoned most enticingly. Marked as 6330m on Harish Kapadia's sketch map it was rocky ridged, free from big snow features, shapely, and close to camp: we had our target and we were going to be climbers again.

We packed for a two-day round trip, then spent the afternoon of the last clear, warm day scrambling up a boulder field, and then an easy ridge, to a comfortable open bivouac at about 5600m on the complex south-west side

of the mountain. We were in high spirits, out on the hill again. Waking in the dawn to a cover of fresh snow only briefly subdued us.

We went off as if we'd heard a starting pistol. Down off our ridge, up and across a broad ice couloir, the field spreading out as we found our own rhythms, up and over a sound rocky rib, then the joy of moving unfettered up the ice of another couloir, then a scuzzy rib of snowed-up loose choss (only M1, but absurdly lethal). Maybe another couloir and rib (who was counting?), another ice traverse, and then a final long haul straight up a steepening ice field to arrive, breathless, on the ridge.

I'd taken the rope out to protect Paul and Simon up the final 10 metres of ice, so we kept it on as we moved together along a horizontal ridge adorned



On the summit of Dunglung Kangri (l to r) Simon Yearsley, Malcolm Bass and Paul Figg, (Simon Yearsley)

and out of view as the clouds blew in and away.

We set off moving together up the steepening ground, me placing ice screws as our insurance. But it soon began to feel too sketchy. I was having to work too hard to get picks and points placed well in the shiny, polished ice underneath the powder and slab. Someone would slip sooner or later, so we switched to pitching. The wind was rising and the sky was darkening. We were all getting cold. It began to feel serious. The snow layer got deeper, I was trenching as much as climbing. My hands were suffering from the clearing, so minutes of wind-milling now slowed things down still further. To Paul and Simon, huddled static in the wind at the belays, I seemed to be moving with glacial slowness. How much further? So hard to tell in the brief clearings. The lateness of the hour. The cold. Scratching blunt crampons on the shiny, shiny ice. The rope weighted, the screws weighted. Screams of fear and anger. The inevitable question comes up, but not a chance, no bastard way with the summit just half a rope away and us suddenly all at home again on some darkening Scottish plateau, wind and snow battered, scared, alive, and exulting in the fight.

And we got there. And when we did there was still sufficient light to

with granite gendarmes that we turned by rocky moves to the east. A rising wind began driving grey clouds and flights of snow onto our left cheeks as we moved along the broadening ridge. We passed a misplaced frozen pond, then Simon, in the lead, just about avoided falling into a hidden crevasse. We reached a wide col where the great snow bowl of the east face rose to meet the ridge. The summit pyramid above came in

catch awful glimpses through the clouds down the steep north face, and to take multiple mug shots. At 6365m (by the altimeter) the air was moist enough to rime our beards. As is our tradition we held off any congratulations for when we were safely down. Then Simon set the first of the many abseils he would set though the long night and we were away.

Had we been going straight down to the glacier we might well have been back in basecamp for a late supper. But we'd left our bivvi kit at some unknown height on one of many rocky ribs on the south-west side of the mountain. No one was entirely sure how many couloirs we'd crossed, nor how ascending or otherwise our traverses had been. In the end we needed the first light of the new day to find the right place. Now was the time for congratulations and celebration. We screamed and shouted, we jumped up and down. It had been a hard, long trip, and we had finally reached a summit. Not the one we had come for. Not the beautiful sunlit Rimo III. But a wild, windswept, unknown mountain of our own. We lit the stove and began melting snow. Our voices were breaking as we talked about the climb, and there were tears in all of our eyes. Joy of course, and some relief, but those two only parts of the story. Four months on I can remember the tears well, both feeling them and seeing them. But I am no closer now than I was then to understanding them.

Observations of an expedition artist – Rachel Antill

An alpinist may dream of creating a clean, pristine line on a snow-laced face such as Rimo III. When achieved it is because of the years of experience, training, planning and a dash of luck coming together in an amazing, perhaps almost improbable combination.

As an artist, my drive is to create a body of work that has the poignancy, awe and transience of an alpinist's first ascent. Through painting I try to make images that translate to the viewer the rawness, the richness and the sheer inevitability of wilderness mountains.

The same as any climber embarking on an expedition, exploring new creative territory, you have to give your all and accept that you win some, you lose some and sometimes you break even. All you can do is be ready for when the opportunities pass your way.

Travelling to the Karakoram provided the chance to experience and document a landscape so seldom visited that I was sure to find new directions in my work.

The fascination with landscape is the effect it has on our understanding of our existence and purpose. Paintings and moving images are explorations of the vast qualities of space found in landscape that reflect an expansion of understanding which evolves when we take time to be in a wilderness.

Rather than representations of what we think we see, paintings are a formulation of layers that investigate what I am trying to find in exploration. Painting can ask questions of our presence of mind, and our perception of the world.



Rachel Antill, *Snow showers above basecamp*, 2012, watercolour and pencil, 25x15cm.



Rachel Antill painting at basecamp.
(Malcolm Bass)

To prepare for such a trip you need a strategy as to how in the field you will go about gathering the information you want or find. Many have a romantic view that as an artist on expedition you roll up sketchbook or camera in hand, sit down and get to work as inspiration strikes. If only this were true.

In reality you do all the same things as the other expedition members: travel, walk in, establish camp etc and then in the moments when the expedition trail pauses for rest or makes camp you have to be focused and try to muster the energy and creativity to record your surroundings. Due to terrain, weather, hazards, route finding, acclimatisation, your time is seldom your own and you have to pursue your artistic aspirations with



Rachel Antill, *White wall series no ii*, 2013, watercolour emulsion and pencil, 12x12cm.

dogged determination.

This trip was no exception and I had to refine plans to film and paint several times. Logistics and weather meant some plans had to be shelved, but during the trip I managed to make more than 30 paintings, take more than 500 still photographs and record several hours of film and sound footage. I also reached a personal high of 6000m on Rimo I and made several explorations of the North Terong glacier above advanced basecamp.

Now back in the studio the unrefined elements of research are starting points for a new body of work that, with support from the Arts Council for England, will be exhibited later in 2013. Hopefully after all the hard work and with a dash of luck it will become a daring and evocative collection of work.

For further information go to www.lightmove.co.uk



Rachel Antill, *Dunglung Kangri*, 2012, watercolour and chinagraph crayon, 25x15cm.

Summary: An account of an Indo-British expedition to Rimo III in the Indian Karakoram in August–September 2012. Although unsuccessful on the south-west face of Rimo III the team made a first ascent of a 6365m peak that they named Dunglung Kangri. Expedition members: Satyabrata Dam (Indian leader), Malcolm Bass (British leader) Paul Figg, Simon Yearsley, Rachel Antill (expedition artist), Raj Kumar (liaison officer), Konchok Thinless, Tashi Phunchok and Dan Singh Harkotiya (high altitude porters), Nima Bhutia and Norbu Tamang (cooks), Pemba Lama, Ramesh Lama, Padma Dorjay and Stanzin Norboo (kitchen staff), Kanchan Singh and Vinay Kumar (Indian Army representatives).

Acknowledgements: The expedition was awarded the 2012 Polartec Challenge Grant, and the Lyon Expedition Award 2012 for which we are all extremely grateful. The expedition was also generously supported by the British Mountaineering Council, Montane, High5, Needle Sports and Swaledale Outdoors. Paul, Malcolm and Simon were supported by the Mount Everest Foundation and The Alpine Club Climbing Fund for the trip's climbing objectives. Rachel is extremely grateful for the support of the Arts Council for England and Pip Seymour Paints in achieving the artistic objectives of the expedition. We also would like to thank the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, the Indian Army, and Rimo Expeditions for their support in India.

DES RUBENS

Return to Zanskar



Geoff Cohen on the upper glacier approaching the col on the first ascent of Mama Ri (Pt 6150), climbed by skyline. (*Des Rubens*)

By chance, due to last minute changes, in summer 2012 I found myself returning to a part of India I had last visited 35 years previously. Indeed, I hadn't been to India at all in the intervening period, a time during which the Sub-continent had acquired an additional 600 million citizens, doubling the population to 1.2 billion. I therefore anticipated a few changes.

I did have some forebodings regarding this return visit although I had no illusions regarding returning to places of one's youth. Any idyllic memories are inevitably erased by the intervening developments. Generally, one is disappointed. In this I was to be proved to some extent correct. However, the experience showed to me that it was still a privilege to have the freedom to return relatively easily to an area with such a wonderful geography.

Zanskar is an ancient kingdom situated in the region of Ladakh in the far north of India. It is bounded on the south-west flank by the Himalayan chain, which here runs roughly in a south-east to north-west direction, and is characterised by a dry climate and difficulty of access, although the construction of roads in the last 30 years has much reduced this difficulty,