



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).

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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,



Above: Des Rubens attired in true '70s' style, 'somewhere in Kashmir'. (*Rubens coll.*)

Left: Geoff Cohen and companion on the Margan pass, Kashmir, 1977. (*Rubens coll.*)



Des Rubens carrying an 80lb load on the Durung Drung glacier, Kishtwar massif, Zanskar, 1977. (*Rubens coll.*)

at least in summer. The area is a haven of traditional Tibetan Buddhist culture although there has been an influx of other influences in recent years through the tourism industry and servicing the ever-present military. Since it was opened to visitors in 1974 Zanskar has become very popular for trekking and many, often small, expeditions have visited the area.

In 1977 I journeyed to Kashmir and Zanskar with Geoff Cohen and Rob Collister. Geoff was already an old friend and we had climbed together in the Hindu Raj range in Pakistan two years previously. He has continued to have a particular interest in exploratory mountaineering in the Indian sub-continent and has garnered an extensive knowledge of some of the remoter crannies of the Himalaya. Rob is likewise inclined and his researches provided the basis for our 1977 journey.

His continued concerns about the environmental impact of our sport have featured in this journal.

The three of us travelled to Zanskar by plane, train and bus via Delhi, Srinagar and Kargil. But before getting too nostalgic regarding the hardships of this 1977 excursion, I should recall our journey to Rawalpindi two years earlier when five of us, mainly students, travelled for 17 days in a van from Edinburgh. This journey was punctuated by almost daily

breakdowns – it was the van's first excursion outwith the Hebridean island of Benbecula and it had not been extensively road-tested - and some interesting and occasionally hostile interactions with local people. In contrast, undertaking effectively the same journey by air two years later in a time of a few hours was overwhelmingly straightforward.

Geoff and I then had 10 days of mountain exploration in the Wardwan valley in Kashmir before meeting Rob in Srinagar and catching the local bus onwards. Bus travel effectively ended at Panikar in the Suru valley; although a road was being pushed on further, travel was only by expensive jeep or rare construction trucks. We thus hired two horses for our equipment and a local man, Hassan, to manage them. I can still remember Rob's look of disappointment when he realised we were not going to get all our gear and food for the next several weeks onto a single animal. I think his words were; 'it seems a bit of a failure, really'. (Rob was, and doubtless still is, a staunch advocate of the lightweight low-key approach to expeditions.) It's maybe as well he was not present to witness our animal entourage 35 years in the future.

Our walk up to the Pensi La took four days, during which we passed from the Islamic culture of the lower Suru valley to the Tibetan Buddhist culture of the two villages before the final ascent to the Pensi La. I still remember the slow approach to the first village, Zhulduk, distant for many miles over the wide, level valley. Everything changed – domestic architecture, the physical features of the people, language, dress, custom and the bearing of women. We camped near the village and were visited by a shy young lama with whom we shared tea and butter. Large herds of horses and *zhos* were grazing on pastures around the village; in the distance, a group of red-robed horsemen were riding from the direction of the nearby monastery, Ringdom Gompa.

The following day, we visited the monastery. The monks were undertaking some repair work so we gave them a hand ferrying sand up from the plain below. Despite the language barrier, smiles indicated that the gesture was appreciated. We then continued to the Pensi La and had a rather bleak Scottish mist kind of evening huddled over a horse dung fire. In the morning, in much brighter weather, we parted from Hassan, shouldered 80lb loads and dropped down to the long Durung Drung glacier. In a day and a half we tottered 10 miles up the glacier. Rob was much stronger than Geoff or me and we dubbed him 'the Man of Iron'. He was generally a dark speck in the distance after the first half hour of staggering; we had no walking poles in those days.

Over the next fortnight we climbed two fine mountains, Viewpoint and Delusion peaks, in generally indifferent weather, after which, there being no sign of the weather improving, we decided to return to the Pensi La and walk out through Zanskar to Darcha. At the time, I regarded this as a second best option to climbing, an indication of the way I took these areas for granted.

Despite having two weeks less of food and gas, we were still carrying

very large loads. The Collistorean food regime permitted a fairly large breakfast of muesli and powdered milk, but two small bars of chocolate were regarded as adequate for the following 18 to 20 miles on dusty paths with packs still weighing about 50 pounds. I was not helped in the matter of rations by being with a companion with a pitiable strength of will regarding matters of food. After the first 20 minutes of walking, with the Man of Iron already a dot on the horizon, Geoff would collapse heavily onto the ground, remove his sack and unwrap and consume his first bar of chocolate. Ten minutes of resting would follow, after which the remaining bar shared the same fate. As witness to this behaviour, it was difficult not to follow suit.

We were then rather shakily set up for the remaining 18 miles. I have seldom experienced such hunger. One day, on entering a village, the poor but hospitable villagers, seeing our weakened state, brought us endless rounds of *tsampa* and peas, much to our gratitude and guilt. It was a long time before we summoned up the will to shoulder our packs and leave this place.

Fortunately, after a few days, we were able to commandeer a yak and dispense with the pain of the sacks – the small boy in charge of the animal was undeniably reluctant, but we were desperate men.

Padum, the capital of Zaskar, did at least boast a tourist officer and a café, although the latter merely consisted of a dusty room with a table and some means of dispensing tea and biscuits. Rob and I needed to procure an animal and driver for the walk out to Darcha. This process took a couple of days because, as the local *tehsildar* informed us, the harvest was in ‘full swing’ and there wasn’t much available labour. After some time, a local man named Gyatso was found to be willing to take us by the direct route over the Shingo La to Darcha. A chit was required for Gyatso to leave Zaskar but eventually the paperwork was in order. Meanwhile, Geoff ploughed a lonely furrow over the Umasi La, his travel arrangements obliging him to return via Srinagar.

We left Padum with Gyatso as our guide accompanied by one pack-horse. Gyatso, like most Ladakhis, was fervently religious and would recite prayers at rest stops. Five long days of walking took us to Darcha. During this time we saw no other foreign visitors, although we had met trekkers elsewhere in Zaskar.

My 1977 diary recalls the following incident:

‘We pitched the tent and got a brew on, surrounded by the usual crowd of local worthies and children. These delightfully mischievous creatures diverted an irrigation stream through our tent door at which the sahibs told them to clear off, to their great joy. I rediverted it. Eventually Rob got so irritated with the crowds peering through the door he told them to clear off (again) and shut the door.’

Looking back on the experience now, I didn’t realise then how fortunate we were to be travelling in that roadless land, where the intensity of the culture was to a large extent protected by its isolation. Women rode



Giabul Nala area, Zaskar. The peak on the right is Pt. 6150 (Mama Ri): Geoff Cohen and Des Rubens made the first ascent during the Scottish Zaskar Expedition 2012 by a route close to right skyline. Unclimbed G22 (c. 6100m) on left. (Andy Nisbet)

by proudly on horseback, displaying their wealth in the form of impressive jade headdresses. Monasteries were wonderfully perched high above rivers, isolated on high rocks. It was clear that religion played a major part in the life of all the inhabitants. The economy was largely subsistence with trading of rice and other foodstuffs brought in by animal trains or porters.

Gyatso was an efficient guide. We shared his *tsampa* as well as receiving occasional *chang* and peas from friendly villagers. At the end of the trip, we paid him 300 rupees, plus 10 rupees and the spare atta (flour) as baksheesh, fair reward we thought for his excellent service and companionship.

Thirty-five years later. . .

Gone, for us, the days in overcrowded trains and buses; in 2012 an hour in an Airbus sufficed for the journey from Delhi to Leh. First impressions were of the usual Indian town outskirts, a chaos of noisy and polluting vehicles. We stopped at a pleasant B & B on the higher, quieter and greener side of town and enjoyed a couple of days’ acclimatising. Although old Leh retains its architectural character, it was difficult to ignore the dusty skies and the noise and smoke of the street generators supplementing the town’s erratic electricity supply. The centre of the town is crowded with companies serving a clientele of trekkers, rafters, and climbers intent on the local 6000-metre peak in the notably short time of only four days. The conspicuous presence of Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians gives Leh a multi-cultural feel, while Indian Army encampments on the outskirts of town



Final camp for Des Rubens and Geoff Cohen on their ascent of Mama Ri (Pt. 6150m) which is seen beyond. (Des Rubens)

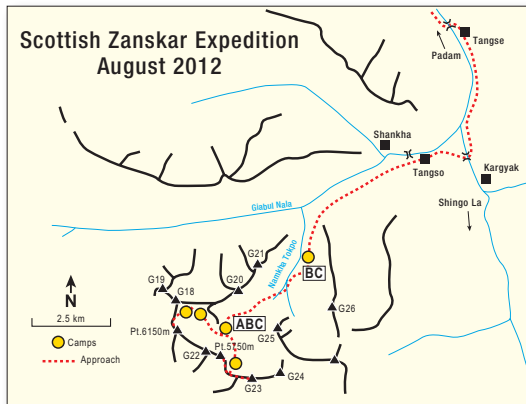


High altitude porters Mangal Singh (left) and Govind Singh (Susan Jensen)

and at intervals along the road to Kargil are a powerful manifestation of the political sensitivity of this border area.

(I should also mention that in 2012, before departing the UK and on arrival in Delhi, we had to deal with Indian bureaucracy and insurance problems. This was left largely to our leader, Susan Jensen, who did a sterling job. Although old India hands are familiar with the machinations of the Indian Mountaineering Federation, for newcomers, the processing requires a degree of fortitude not dissimilar to the actual ascent of the peaks. If you go to India, it is well worth going with someone who enjoys office work.)

From Leh we had two and a bit dusty and bone-shaking days of driving. Entering Zhulduk, the old village atmosphere has been transformed by enormous satellite



Susan Jensen, Bob Hamilton, Steve Kennedy and Andy Nisbet attempted G22, the peak shown left, but called a halt on reaching the subsidiary snow peak, Pt. 5750, on right, calling it Shan Ri ('Snow Leopard Peak'). (Andy Nisbet)

communication dishes, radio masts and accompanying modern offices. A couple of makeshift restaurants have opened up. On the positive side, the Ladakh Ecological Development Group was advertising a number of initiatives involving 'passive solar and energy efficiency', and elsewhere in Zanskar we saw tree-planting projects.

The next experience was more troubling. A couple of miles further on we came to Ringdom Gompa, where a checkpoint forced us to a halt. Perusing a nearby stupa, I was deeply saddened to see it was a memorial to three Ringdom monks murdered 'at the hands of cruel fundamentalist enemy agents' in July 2000. It was hard to reconcile the peaceful image of our first visit with this incident of brutality, along with the armed camp now situated by the monastery.

Padum, the 'capital', had also changed. Formerly a large village of alleyways with dung drying on the walls, it is now a town, the small centre filled with restaurants and hotels and other services including, possibly, hair-dressing. Prayer wheels have been modernised to an impressive size and placed in prominent positions. Although Padum is still a pleasant place, a nasty encounter with a Kashmiri taxi driver sullied the visit for me. When the direct road from Leh to Padum is completed, the journey between the two towns will be reduced from two long days to about six hours, opening further opportunities for the Zanskar tourist industry.

After an overnight stop in Padum, we drove for a few hours up the

Presumed snow leopard tracks near the summit of Pt. 5750 that inspired the name Shan Ri. (Andy Nisbet)

Lingti valley to the current road-head near Dordzong. (The road will eventually be extended to Darcha.) In 1977, approaching on foot, I had marvelled at the first monastery out from Padum, situated on an Edinburgh Castle-like rock high above the river. It's hard to have the same satisfaction when your face is squeezed against the dusty window of a jolting bus.

On reaching Dordzong, we met our onward transport, efficiently organised for us by our Delhi agency, Himalayan Run and Trek. I hesitate to admit that on this occasion we required 16 horses for the approach to our destination, Giabul Nala. In mitigation our party was now 13 strong, rather than three. The walk itself was more like that of the old days, although this time we passed a few, not entirely unwelcome, teahouses and even a beer shop. Nor did we have myriads of onlookers on pitching camp every night, the locals now being more used to visitors.

Our party consisted of seven of us from Scotland, of whom six were climbers, one liaison officer (Chetan Pandey), one basecamp manager, one cook boy, one cook/runner and two high altitude porters (HAPS). I am not naïve enough to think that, with a relatively large party, to use an agency was not the best way of managing things. There were other novelties. For example, the role of the HAPS was a mystery to me, since I'd associated such mystical beings with desperate ascents on 8000m peaks. However, as well as being hardworking and friendly companions, they did make possible our success in the two short weeks we had at basecamp. Govind Singh and Mangal Singh speeded up the carrying of loads to advance base and beyond, allowing us a reasonable crack at our intended peaks.



G22 (c. 6100m) with subsidiary Shan Ri on left. (Des Rubens)

After retracing my 1977 steps up towards the Shingo La for two days, we turned right (west) before the village of Kargyak and stopped at Thangso, just beyond the entrance to the Giabul Nala. Apart from solar panels and the occasional satellite dish, the villages seemed largely unchanged, although we were surprised by the number of young people who had some command of English, and, in the case of Thangso, French, an outcome of foreign charities supporting schools in the area. Next day we reached basecamp, situated at 4400m in the Namkha Topko, a major tributary on the south side of the Giabul Nala.

The next two weeks gave us all the best of exploratory mountaineering. A glaciated valley with all peaks unclimbed, it was again a privilege to be able to explore such an area. Some detective work indicated that the only known previous visitors were Kimikazu Sakamoto, from Japan, and friends who in 2011 explored some of the Giabul Nala area and its surrounds, and enumerated the peaks using a 'G' system, but did no climbing. Although we had homed in from above on Google Earth from the comfort of our armchairs (what would Tilman have thought of that?), the detail was not sufficiently accurate to garner much useful information.

Between us we climbed three new peaks. I was particularly pleased to climb my first new peak for many years on a fine day, amidst a period of indifferent, though seldom very bad, weather. (The weather had also been indifferent in 1977.) From our advance base, the westerly branch of the upper part of the glacial system of the Giabul Nala curled tantalisingly



Phuktal monastery, Zanskar - 'a powerful sense of spiritual atmosphere'.
(Des Rubens)



Memorial to three monks murdered in 2000, Ringdum Gompa. (Des Rubens)

The prospect was a pleasant one. We had a view of Pt. 6150 and could discern a possible route through a buttress on the skyline above the col between our mountain and G18. The next day the weather was poor, but a reconnaissance to a point above the col indicated feasibility. In line with a policy of moving slowly

around a corner towards a col below Pt. 6150. (This spot height is shown on the Olizane trekking map). No one, to our knowledge, had been up here before. Over a couple of days, Geoff and I carried loads with the help of Govind and established a tent at 5200m. Govind then returned and Geoff and I were on our own for the next four days.

The prospect was a pleasant one. We had a view of Pt. 6150 and could discern a possible route through a buttress on the skyline above the col between our mountain and G18. The next day the weather was poor, but a reconnaissance to a point above the col indicated feasibility. In line with a policy of moving slowly

and camping high, we established one more camp below the col.

Unusually, our summit day (17 August) dawned fine. From the col, four very exposed pitches of about AD grade led up to a loose rib and then a level area that allowed for a breather. Nothing could stop us now except age and decrepitude (factors not to be readily dismissed in men of our age and with our not-far-below-the-surface-of-the-skin reservoir of ailments). We continued, albeit slowly, up a fine corniced ridge. Despite the sun, snow conditions for the remainder of the ascent remained perfect and we reached the summit at about 1pm. We were tremendously pleased. We were on the highest peak in the area with outstanding views of the nearby Himalayan peaks.



The descent was done in textbook style and we were back at our high camp after 12 hours out. Great care had to be taken on the exposed pitches, now soft snow over bullet-hard ice, and security was poor.

That same day Susan Jensen, Andy Nisbet, Steve Kennedy and Bob Hamilton also climbed good two peaks, Shan Ri (5750m) and Scottish Ri (5850m G23), on the same day that Geoff and I summited. Unfortunately, the main peak, G22 (c6100m), presented some difficulties and it was decided not to attempt it from this side.

Having achieved these successes, we were on course to attempt further objectives during our last days, but the extrication of Mangal Singh from a crevasse affected the plans of all of us. Mangal had fallen about 5m and while hauling him out Govind Singh was hit by an ice axe which came loose from a belay. Mangal sustained a cut lip, expertly stitched up by an Italian doctor in Padam.

Contrasting the 1977 and 2012 expeditions, had we adopted the old regime I think we would have had equal success, but we would have required a further week or so to shift loads above basecamp. It is hard to be nostalgic about the tedious business of carrying mammoth loads, particularly as one's spinal soft tissue continues its inexorable degeneration.

The Scottish Zanskar team in Leh. Standing (l to r): Andy Nisbet, Chetan Pandey (LO), Des Rubens, Geoff Cohen, Mangal Singh (HAP), Bob Hamilton, Tsering (kitchen assistant). Seated: Steve Kennedy, Nancy Kennedy, Govind Singh, (HAP), Heera Singh (cook and runner), Naveen Chandra (basecamp manager and head cook), Susan Jensen. (Susan Jensen)

However, I think because the HAPS were available, there was a tendency to carry up more equipment than necessary.

As in 1977, we were a good team with entertaining companions upon whom we could rely in all circumstances. Adequate supplies of Scottish-sourced alcohol and general good all round mateyness led to some enjoyable evenings at basecamp and elsewhere.

On the walkout, Steve, Susan and I visited Phuktal monastery, four miles off the main track. The monastery appears to rise out of almost vertical crags; its sense of isolation and powerful spiritual atmosphere made the visit a moving experience. Our arrival, around midday, coincided with the release of a number of young monks around 12 to 14 years old from morning classes. As a former teacher, I was pleased to note a few of them relieving the presumed tedium of lessons by whipping each other with their traditional scarves as they tumbled down dangerously steep steps. Yet the incursions of modern life cannot be far away. The road-head will soon be only a few miles distant. Modern communications will follow. Will life in the monastery then have the same attractions for these young men?

On reflection, I feel enormously fortunate to have experienced Zaskar in 1977. It is not for me to judge whether the lives of the inhabitants have been improved or disadvantaged by the subsequent changes. Doubtless many Zaskaris will embrace the opportunity to watch the Indian TV version of 'I'm a celebrity... etc.' And I would not myself turn down the advantages of electricity or indoor plumbing.

The essence of remoteness that shaped the Zaskaris' way of life is diminishing. Selfishly, for those of us who enjoy a long journey through mountainous terrain, it has also become much harder to make a lengthy, uncontrived journey out of necessity to reach an objective, or to simply make an interesting expedition from a natural starting place to a logical destination. For all that, as our Scottish Zaskar expedition found, it is nevertheless remarkable how much untrodden ground remains in the mountains of India.

Summary: an account of the Scottish Zaskar Expedition to the Giabul Nala area of Zaskar, Jammu and Kashmir, India, in August 2012. First ascents of Shan Ri (c5750m) and Scottish Ri (c5850m [G23]) by Susan Jensen, Bob Hamilton, Steve Kennedy and Andy Nisbet; and of Mama Ri (6150m) by Geoff Cohen and Des Rubens. All three peaks climbed on 17 August 2012.

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Details of the 1977 expedition are in Collister R, AJ83, 206-7 (1978) and a full report of the 2012 expedition can be found under 'Zaskar' on the MCofS website.

MICK FOWLER

The Prow of Shiva

Paul Ramsden and I were ready to go. Permits had been granted, tickets bought and bureaucratic hurdles overcome. Pre-expedition excitement was building. Then, the month before departure, we received an e-mail from Andrey Muryshev, leader of one of only two expeditions to have enjoyed a good view of our intended objective, the north-east pillar, or Prow, of Shiva (6142m) in the Indian Himalaya:

'Frankly I cannot imagine how you will do it... It is c700m of climbing after the col and it is north-west side [sic] in October – all the rock will be frozen. From the other hand, the ice will be scarce as the buttress is very steep. So it will be very hard dry tooling and very hard protection. I saw your route on Siguniang – it is much easier.'



Shiva from the Miyar valley – 'something rather special'. (Andrey Muryshev)

In addition, Bruno Moretti, leader of an expedition that had had a good view of the east side in 2010, had already suggested that the rock was likely to be terrible.

All in all it didn't paint that positive a picture. But the photos Andrey and Bruno had kindly shared with us spoke for themselves. Shiva is an isolated 6000m peak in the Pangi District of Himachal Pradesh. Bruno felt the Prow stood out as the best line in the area and Andrey's e-mail ended by saying he thought it was 'inspiring'. That was good enough for us. I did