



## From Rassa to Sumur.....a journey of exploration and climbing.

In 2001, a glimpse of Rassa glacier, during our expedition to Arganglas valley indicated great opportunity for exploration and climbing. In July / August 2014, this turned to reality as our team from The Himalayan Club consisting of Rajesh Gadgil, Atin Sathe, Vineeta Muni and I ventured into this remote glacier.

Due to security restrictions and their remote location, a majority of the mountains, valleys and glaciers of the Eastern Karakoram Range have been left untouched by mountaineers. Rassa glacier is located off Nubra valley, northeast of the famous Khardung la and southeast of Siachen glacier. Except for a single visit to the snout in 2001, the glacier had not seen any mountaineering and/or trekking activity. None of the peaks on the glacier were even attempted before.



Our team left Mumbai on 15 July 2014 and flew into Leh, accompanied by an enthusiastic group of trekkers consisting of Ratnesh Javeri, Rajendra Wani, Dr. Kamal Limdi, Dr. Nandini Limdi, Dr. Kalpesh Jain and Dr. Sonal Jain. After acclamatising in Leh for a few days the team drove over Wari la (5290 m) into Nubra valley.

The team trekked over the rugged terrain of Arganglas valley for three days before reaching near the proposed basecamp site, only to be stopped by a raging river originating from Phunangma glacier. All attempts to find a safe crossing point nearby proved futile so the team was forced to camp on the southern banks of the river for the night. They had to trek to the snout of Phunangma glacier and cross to the other side over its icy surface in order to establish base camp on 28 July at 4820 m. Later a rope was secured across the river to transfer loads and the climbers themselves for the rest of the expedition. Three precious days were lost in the process.



The next few days were spent in reconnaissance of the area and to find a route to the advanced base camp on Rassa glacier. On 2 August 2014, the trekkers made their way back whilst the climbers shifted to ABC(5220 m) to start climbing in earnest.



Rassa glacier consists of many subsidiaries. The team entered the branch which was named 'Glacier I' and established Camp 1(5780m). The panorama of peaks had opened out. We decided to climb P. 6219 m first as it would provide an opportunity to view the routes for all the adjoining peaks of the glacier. On 8 August an attempt was made. Unfortunately, by the time we had fixed the first 150 m of rope, the weather closed in. We decided to attempt it in better weather conditions.

Accordingly, we returned to the peak on 12 August and completed remaining 150 m of the climb. After fixing almost 300 m of rope, Rajesh Gadgil, Atin Sathe, Pemba Norboo, Phurba, Pasang and I were on the summit by 11.20 a.m. We were rewarded by grand views on all sides. This also gave us an opportunity to study the peaks around for possible routes of ascent. We had a complete view of 'Glacier II' of Rassa which served as an excellent reference for further plans. The peak was named 'Tusuhm Kangri' meaning 'triangular peak in the corner' in Ladakhi language.



Having spent considerable time in Glacier I, we now decided to shift our attention to the peaks in Glacier II and III. Back to ABC, we now located a way to the entrance of Glacier II and III. The route took us through a maze of boulders and rocks between the snout of the northern part of Rassa

glacier and the peak at the northwestern corner of Glacier I. There was risk of rockfall, but fortunately, none took place.

Two days of bad weather kept us in our tents at ABC. The boulder field we had to cross had become treacherous due to the accumulation of fresh snow and we had to wait for it to melt before we shifted camp.



On 18 August, We were at our new camp, named Camp 2 (5635 m) located near the northwestern corner of Glacier II. A quick recce enabled us to decide on putting our next camp on Glacier III. In the limited time left with us, this would give us better climbing opportunities than Glacier II.

We shifted to this high camp, named Camp 3 (5810 m) on 20 August, located at the base of P. 6250 m and decided to make an attempt. This

peak is one of the most prominent in the area and was constantly visible from the time we had entered Rassa glacier.

On 21 August, we were to start our climb by 5.00 a.m. but that morning the notorious Karakoram wind started lashing at us. It chilled us to the bones making it difficult to get out of the tents. We sat shivering, hoping there would be some letup. Finally we moved out by 7.00 a.m. We had to negotiate a 200 m ice wall to the north to access the summit ridge. The ridge turned out to be knife edged with some sections heavily corniced. Since we ran out of rope, we had to pull up the lowest two ropes from the ice wall to enable us to safeguard the final stretch of the ridge leading towards west to the summit.



Rajesh, Atin, Vineeta and I along with our three Sherpas, Pasang, Phurba and Pemba were at the top by 2.30 p.m. with excellent views on all sides. Considering the prominence of the peak in the glacier, we decided to name it 'Rassa Kangri'.

We now had only two days left before winding up camps, so on the following day, we went for a recce to the head of Glacier III to look at the high peaks at the head of the glacier. A few hours on the glacier brought us to Shukpa pass (6110 m) that leads to

South Shukpa Kunchang glacier and further to Shyok river on the other side. The pass was fairly gentle and could be a possible alternative to Saser la linking Shyok valley with Nubra valley. The peaks around the pass looked promising and challenging. Unfortunately we had run out of time and resources to attempt any more peaks. The weather was also packing up, so we quickly made our way back to camp. We wound it up and with heavy loads retreated to Camp2.



Our thoughts were now on exploring an alternative route back to Nubra valley. We had been eyeing a high col that would lead us to Sumur nala in the north. With just three days in hand, we decided to give it a go. We packed rations for three days and with bare minimum equipment started off across the glacier on 24 August. A gentle slope led to West Rassa la. We hoped an equally gentle slope would lead us to the other side but

our hopes were dashed as we stood at the col (5930 m). A sheer icy drop of more than 200 m greeted us. We could not cross it with the gear we were carrying on our backs within the time available!

After much thought we decided to try the crossing into the inviting Sumur nala once more....this time from East Rassa la. That night, we camped at our Camp 4, located at the junction of both routes at the base of P. 6189 m. On 25 August, we made an early start and reached East Rassa la (6000 m) by 11.00 a.m. A close scrutiny of the drop on the other side revealed a possible route across. We had to negotiate 75 m of very steep ice



and snow slope to reach the safety of the glacier on the other side. It took us considerable time due to the hard ice covered by an uneven layer of soft fresh snow, and the steps we made kept collapsing below our feet.

As we started our way down the glacier, we were caught in strong winds and snowfall. In low visibility we made our way down unknown territory. It was nearly sunset by the time we reached one of the most beautiful camping spots on the banks of Sumur lake, thoroughly exhausted but satisfied with the adventures of the day. On 26 August, we trekked down Sumur nala, facing a two-hour snowstorm and then endless ups and downs and twists and turns over the 18 km route to Nubra valley concluding our expedition at the gates of Samsthaling monastery.

## **SUMMARY:**

Peaks Climbed: (Both were first ascents)

- 1) Peak 6219 m (Tusuhm Kangri) on 12 August 2014 by Rajesh Gadgil, Atin Sathe, Pemba Norboo, Pasang Sherpa, Phurba Sherpa and Divyesh Muni.
- 2) Peak 6250 m (Rassa Kangri) on 21 August by Rajesh Gadgil, Atin Sathe, Vineeta Muni, Pemba Norboo, Pasang Sherpa, Phurba Sherpa and Divyesh Muni.

Passes Visited / Crossed:

- 1) Shukpa pass (6110 m) visited on 22 August by Rajesh Gadgil, Pasang Sherpa, Phurba Sherpa and Divyesh Muni.
- 2) West Rassa la (5930 m) visited on 24 August by Rajesh Gadgil, Atin Sathe, Vineeta Muni, Pasang Sherpa and Divyesh Muni.
- 3) East Rassa la (6000 m) crossed into Sumur nala on 25 August by Rajesh Gadgil, Atin Sathe, Vineeta Muni, Pasang Sherpa and Divyesh Muni.

**Divyesh Muni**  
Leader



**We thank our sponsors for their support to the expedition.**

