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Pakistan 1999

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During the summer of 1999 weather conditions in the Karakoram were unexceptional. Fine weather predominated from June to early July when the mid-summer deterioration set in a little earlier than usual. Unsettled conditions continued throughout late July, August and September when spells of stable weather alternated with violent storms and heavy precipitation. Ministry of Tourism statistics show that 64 expeditions received 69 permits to climb peaks over 6000m. A total of 37 permits were issued for the five 8000m peaks, resulting in 24 teams making successful ascents. The remaining 32 permits were issued to expeditions attempting 20 different peaks in the 6000m - 8000m range. Only 12 of these resulted in success. There were seven mountaineering fatalities; two on 8000m peaks and five on 7000m peaks.

There was a noticeable increase in the number of expeditions visiting Pakistan despite fears that heightened tension along the Line of Control with India would cause some groups to cancel. The 8000m peaks again attracted the largest number of climbers. However there was a significant increase in the number of expeditions attempting technically challenging routes on 7000m peaks, particularly in the Hispar and Batura areas. Unfortunately few of these teams were successful. Almost 20 groups attempted high-standard big wall climbs, mostly in the Trango and Hushe areas, with a considerable amount of success. Japanese climbers were at the forefront of innovative developments on the high peaks of the Karakoram, while climbers from the USA, Germany, Spain, Italy, Norway and the Czech Republic led the way with big wall projects. Each year more western mountaineers are becoming aware of the wealth of climbing opportunities available in Pakistan. However the authorities have much to do before the country can lose its reputation for being a 'difficult' place to visit.

K2 (8611m) None of the four expeditions attempting K2 from the Pakistan side was successful. Takuo Fujiwara's Japanese group reached 7500m on the W Ridge, but encountered dangerous snow conditions above their Camp 4. A multinational expedition led by Italian Manuel Luggli attempted the *Abruzzi Ridge Route*, establishing camp 2 at 6700m. Romanian climber Mihai Cioroianu was killed by a falling rock below camp 2 on 10 July and the expedition was abandoned soon after. The best effort of the season was made by the Austrian pair Hans Klammerlander and Konrad Auer who reached 8400m on 17 July before being halted by deep snow. They had been included on Luggli's permit but opted to climb independently, choosing the *SSE Spur Route* on the lower slopes. This was the route used by the remaining two expeditions who were on the mountain until mid-August.

A young Korean group led by Hyeng Chil Lim reportedly fixed almost 3000m of rope reaching a high point of 7200m. The fourth permit had been issued to Brazilian Waldemar Niclevicz whose team hoped to climb Gasherbrum I, Gasherbrum II and K2 in a single season. After successes on the Gasherbrum peaks three climbers arrived at K2 base camp in late July, and reached an agreement to use the Koreans' ropes. However, poor weather and snow conditions did not enable them to make any impression on K2.

Broad Peak (8047m) Six of the ten expeditions attempting the *Normal Route* were successful in placing members on at least one of the summits. Several expeditions reported poor weather and snow conditions on the mountain, however there were many more ascents than in recent years. Over the summer a total of 28 climbers reached the summit ridge (five on 10 July, nine on 16 July, ten on 17 July, four on 18 July). It is thought that only seven of these climbers reached the true summit, with the remaining 19 turning back at the lower foresummit. There was one fatality when Korean Hun Seung-Kwan was killed, reportedly by an avalanche.

Gasherbrum I (8068m) Four expeditions attempted the standard *Japanese Couloir Route*. Two of these were successful and a total of eight climbers reached the summit. The first ascents of the season were made by members of Waldemar Niclevicz's expedition (who had permission to attempt **G1**, **G2**, and **K2**). Italians Abele Blanc and Christian Kuntner summited in poor weather on 3 July, while Australian Andrew Lock together with Spaniard Pepe Garces enjoyed better conditions on 17 July. These four climbers were the only people to summit **Gasherbrum II** in addition to **Gasherbrum I** in 1999; Lock and Garces on 9 July, Blanc and Kunter on 10 July. The final ascent of Gasherbrum I was made by four Koreans led by Lee Bong-Chul on 18 July. The two unsuccessful teams who suffered from the poorer August weather were Japanese and Spanish.

Gasherbrum II (8035m) As usual this proved to be the most popular 8000m peak in Pakistan with thirteen teams attempting the *Normal Route*. All except one of these expeditions were successful and a total of 41 climbers are thought to have reached the summit. The first ascent of the season occurred on 9 July when fifteen climbers from various expeditions summited in perfect conditions. Seven climbers summiting the following day encountered very different conditions and were forced to descend in a violent storm. Further successful ascents were made on 29 July, 31 July, 3 August, 8 August and 19 August.

Gasherbrum IV (7925m) Two expeditions attempted this intimidating peak from different sides over the summer. Kim Jae-Soo's 12 person Korean team made the fourth overall ascent of the peak via a route on the steep W Face. Exact details of their route are not available, but it is known that Yun Chi-Won and Kang Yeon-Ryon reached the summit on 29/30 June. It is unusual for a peak of this size to be climbed so early in the season, and it seems that the Korean's plan of occupying base camp in May to benefit from expected stable weather in June paid off. American Steve Swenson led his fourth expedition to Gasherbrum IV, this time attempting the S Face/SW Ridge from the normal Gasherbrum I and II base camp. His strong team made an impressive effort on the peak reaching a high point of 7500m; however, they suffered from the unsettled weather affecting the region during August.

Skyang Kangri (7544m) A 12-member Swiss medical expedition led by Urs Wiget conducted research in the vicinity of K2 base camp, before three of the team attempted this peak which has only had one previous ascent. They reached a high point of 7150m on the E Ridge (the route of the 1976 Japanese ascent) on 26 June before dangerous snow conditions forced a retreat.

Masherbrum (7821m) Two expeditions attempted to repeat the 1960 American *Original Route* on this accessible peak which rises above the Hushe valley. Satoshi Kawahara's 10-strong Japanese group reached 7100m on 19 July before retreating in the face of heavy snowfall. Russian Lev Loffe made his second visit to the peak with two other climbers but fared little better than the Japanese, turning back from 7200m on 7 August in poor weather.

No fewer than nine parties visited the **Trango** group attempting high-standard rock routes on the area's famous granite walls. **Trango Tower (6237m)** was visited by four expeditions, two of whom were successful. Alberto Innurategi's four-person Spanish team made the first ascent of the season on 28 June by the *Slovenian Route*, before turning their attentions to Nanga Parbat. Austrians led by Radner Kurt and Spaniards led by Inyaki Perez attempted the same route later in the summer were both unsuccessful. Four Swiss climbers from Verbier led by Roux Frederic reached the summit on 26 July via a new line on the SW Face. The most significant ascents of the season took place on **Great Trango (6286m)** where four expeditions each established major new routes. Three expeditions concentrated on the 2000m NW Face. Americans Jared Ogden, Mark Synott and Alex Lowe arrived in base camp on 22 June and completed their route *Parallel Worlds* (Grade VII, 5.11, A4, 46 pitches) on 29 July. Russian climbers Yuri Kochelenko, Alexander Odintsov, Igor Potankin and Ivan Samoilenko arrived at base camp a few days after the Americans and were forced to select a less attractive line on the wall to the right of the US team. They reached the summit on 10 August christening their line the *Russian Direct* (Grade VII+, 5.11, A4, 66 pitches). A four-man Austro-German team led by Thomas Tovadar arrived at base camp on 25 July also intending to attempt the NW Face. They selected a line at the left side of the face and climbed 35 new pitches, many of them in poor weather, until they joined the line of *Parallel Worlds* which they followed for 10 pitches to a height of c6000m. Poor weather forced them to abandon their attempt on 5 September (*Lost Butterfly*, Grade VII, 5.10, A4+). The fourth team to establish a new route comprised of four Czechs and one Slovakian, led by Ivo Wandracek. They climbed the long SE Ridge of **Trango Pulpit (6050m)** (VII-, A2, 40 pitches) to join the 1977 *American Route*. They followed this to the summit which was reached on 29 July by Dutka, Rinn and Weisser; *More Czech, Less Slovak* (53 pitches). The 1500m NE Face of **Trango Pulpit** received its first ascent from a four man Norwegian expedition. Starting on 23 June Robert Caspersen, Gunnar Karlsen, Per Ludvig Skjerven and Einar Wold climbed 48 pitches to reach the summit on 1 August, naming the route the *Norwegian Direct* (VII, 5.11, A4). These ascents confirm the reputation of the Trango group as the location of the hardest collection of established high-altitude big wall climbs in the world.

Three expeditions visited the high peaks of the Latok group. A very strong four-man German group led by Alex Huber attempted the S Pillar of **Baintha Brakk/The Ogre (7285m)**. The weather never allowed them to progress above a portaledge camp which they had established at 6000m. They abandoned the attempt in early August, leaving Alex and Thomas Huber time to make a fast ascent of the SW Face of **Latok IV (6456m)** before leaving base camp. An 8-member Scottish expedition led by David Morton visited **Latok III (6949m)** intending to climb the N Spur. Deciding that their intended route was too dangerous, members of the team turned their attentions to other objectives close to their base camp. Several lines were attempted on the unclimbed **Hanipispur South (c6300m)** with Dave Hollinger and Paul Schweizer summiting on 28 July via the N Ridge. This pair had earlier summited **Biacherahi Tower (c5800m)** overlooking the Nobande Sobande glacier. On the same day other members of the expedition completed a new route on the W Face of **Indian Face Arête (c5200m)**, a subsidiary of **Latok III**. Two Japanese climbers led by Motomo Ohmiya were unsuccessful in their attempt on the unclimbed summit of **Latok V (6190m)** from a base camp in the Baintha Lukpar glacier.

Three expeditions attempted the popular SE Ridge of **Spantik (7027m)** from the normal base camp on the Chogolungma glacier. Five members of Gunter Mauthe's German group reached the summit on 29 June. Japanese and French groups climbing during August were unsuccessful, reporting poor weather and deep snow. A 10-member commercial expedition from Austria was the only group to visit the straightforward and accessible peak of **Diran (7257m)** above the Minapin glacier. Tragedy struck on 26 July when expedition leader Michael Koblmuller together with Andreas Fischer were killed in an avalanche above Camp 2 on the *N Face (Normal) Route*. Three expeditions visited the infrequently climbed high peaks on the N side of the Hispar glacier. Few details are available about Kazuo Tobita's three-man Japanese attempt on **Kunyang Chish (7852m)** or Sumito Takeda's attempt on **Momhil Sar (7343m)**. Both expeditions were unsuccessful. The unclimbed **Pumari Chish South (7359m)** was attempted from the Yutmaru glacier during September by the British based pair of Roger Payne and Julie-Ann Clyma. Bad weather led to a retreat from their high point of 6200m.

No foreign expeditions climbed in the Shimshal area during 1999. However, the Alpine Club of Pakistan (ACP) has been active in exploring the mountains of this area lying close to the China border, north of the main Karakoram watershed. On these ascents climbers from Pakistan's urban centres have been joined by men from Shimshal village many of whom have gained considerable experience working as high-altitude porters with foreign climbers. On 25 February a rare winter ascent was made when **Pir Peak (6363m)** was climbed by three members of an ACP expedition. Later in the year the straightforward peak of **Manglik Sar (6050m)** was climbed on 23 June by a second ACP expedition containing many of the same members.

Five teams visited the region lying to the west of the Karakoram Highway (KKH). In Hunza a British expedition led by Alan Pilkington attempted to make the second ascent of **Sangemar Mar (6949m)** above the Muchuhar glacier.

Unsettled warm weather meant that the lower section of the route was exposed to stonefall and avalanche danger and the team made little progress. An experienced Japanese group led by Atsushi Inenaga attempted the difficult and rarely climbed peak of **Batura I (7786m)** via the S Face from a base camp on the Muchuhar glacier. In early August, Y Fujita, T Seki and H Sugiyama were moving above Camp 3 (6500m) when they were swept to their deaths by a large avalanche. This was the greatest loss of life in a single accident in the Karakoram during the 1999 season. Also climbing from the Muchuhar glacier was Luis Lopez's six-member Spanish team attempting **Muchu Chish (7453m)**. Although they were unsuccessful on the S Face they are thought to be the first team to attempt this difficult peak.

The remote peak of **Sakar Sar (6272m)** on the Afghan border overlooking the Wakhan corridor received its first ascent from a group led by Miyazawa Akira. All four Japanese members reached the summit together with two Pakistani climbers via a route on the SE Flank. The peak of **Koz Sar (6677m)** above the Karambar valley was the scene of another important first ascent by Japanese climbers when three members of Ichiro Yamagata's party completed a difficult technical climb on the S Face during August.

Only one expedition is known to have climbed in the Hindu Kush. Ken Findlay led seven UK climbers in an attempt to complete the unclimbed *1958 British route* on the NE Ridge of **Saraghrar (7394m)**. Finding this route to be dangerous they changed to the *1967 Japanese Route* on the S Face before being halted at a high point of 5490m by poor weather and snow conditions. 21 young climbers from various countries attended a UIAA training camp led by Frenchman Manu Pellissier in the Hindu Raj during September. From a base camp at the foot of the Ghalsaper glacier a large number of new lines were climbed on a variety of rock and mixed objectives. Significant peaks climbed included **Chikari (5928m)** and **Tutaneki (5415m)**.

Nanga Parbat (8125m) Five expeditions visited Pakistan's most accessible 8000m peak, all concentrating on the *Kinshofer Route* on the Diamir Face. Four were successful and 18 climbers reached the summit: eight members of Peter Guggenmos's German expedition on 2 July, two members of Um Hong Gil's Korean expedition on 12 July, five members of Takehiko Ikedi's Japanese expedition on 27/28/29 July and three members of Alberto Innurragi's Spanish expedition on 29 July. The Spanish team made a particularly rapid ascent after having acclimatised by making an ascent of **Trango Tower** in the Baltoro area. They were also involved in rescuing Volker Stallbohm, the leader of the unsuccessful Colombian Nanga Parbat expedition, from 6600m on 13 July.

Statistics on sub-6000m ascents are difficult to collect; however, it appears that an increasing number of groups from around the world are being drawn to the Karakoram. Most climbers are attempting high-standard rock climbs on the region's many granite walls and towers, but there are also significant ascents being made on mixed mountaineering routes. Dave Wilkinson's small British party visited the Ganchen Massif to the east of the Basha river, making first ascents of **Shel Chakpa (5800m)** by the WNW Ridge on 8 August and **Barbanchen (5700m)** by WNW Flank on 19 August. A four-man Dutch

expedition completed two new routes on **Shani (5885m)** in the Naltar valley. On 22 August, A Amons and M Redeker reached the East Summit by the 1000m NE Spur. E van der Gragt and B Netelenbos reached the Main Summit via the 1300m SE Face on 30 August, followed by their two compatriots the following day.

All the reported big wall climbs took place in the vicinity of the Hushe valley with the exception of Ludwig Qvarnstorm's four-man Swedish team who made the second ascent of 1300m *Ogden/Synott 1997 Route* on **Shipton Spire (5852m)**. Three teams attempted the spectacular unclimbed 1200m W Face of **Amin Brakk (5750m)** in the Nangma valley. First on the scene was a Korean team who abandoned 1000m of fixed rope on the uncompleted *1996 Basque Route* when they ran out of time. Subsequently Czech climbers M Holecek, F Silhan and D Stastny completed this route to the summit making the first ascent of the peak on 12 August after spending 11 days on the wall. At the same time, the experienced Spanish trio of P Masip, S Vidal and M Puigdomenech were establishing a separate line further to the left. This appears to have been a more difficult climb requiring 30 continuous days of climbing before the summit was reached on 6 August (*Sol Solet*, 1650m, A4+/A5, 22 pitches). Also in the Nangma valley, New Zealand climbers are reported to have attempted **Brakk Zang (4800m)** and three Spaniards completed a new route on the W Face of **Changi Tower (5820m)**, summiting on 15 July after completing 29 pitches in an eleven-day push (*Ludopatia*, 1200m, 7a+, A3). Italians led by Luca Maspes became the first climbers to visit the relatively small Kahridas valley between the Nangma and Charakusa valleys. They discovered granite formations similar to those of the better known areas and climbed two new routes: **King Brakk (4900m)** and **Allah's Finger (5000m)**. It appears that only one expedition visited the Charakusa valley to the north; however, they made three impressive ascents. Americans J Chin, E Howe, D Workman and J Workman spent six weeks operating from K7 base camp, making the second ascent of **Fati Brakk (5600m)** by a new route on the N Face (5.10+, A3, W14+, 21 pitches), the first ascent of **Parhat Brakk (5600m)** by the 1000m N Ridge (*Tavis*, VI, 5.11, A3, 22 pitches) and establishing a new line on the 750m SE Face of **Beatrice (5800m)** to the right of the 1997 British routes (*Wanderlust*, VI, 5.10+, A3).

Peak Fees The Pakistan Government's increased peak fees (listed in AJ 1999) will take effect in 2000. However an important change in the regulations means that the basic royalty fee will now cover teams of up to seven climbers and not five as was previously the case. Additional expedition members above this number must pay a per person supplement.