

Malubiting—snow peak above desert valleys

Horst Schindlbacher

(Translation: E. N. Bowman)

On 23 August 1971, four Graz members of the Styrian High Mountain Group of the Austrian Alpine Verein, Hilmar Sturm, Hanns Schell, Kurt Pirker and Horst Schindlbacher, succeeded in making the first ascent of the 7459-m peak of Malubiting in the Karakoram.

Six unsuccessful attempts on this peak were made in the years between 1955 and 1970 by German, British, Japanese, Polish and Pakistan expeditions.

The seventh expedition to reach the foot of the mountain consisted of the four Styrians, accompanied by a Polish doctor, Dr Jerzy Hajdukiewicz from Zakopane, in charge of the medical arrangements, and a Pakistan army officer Capt Muhammad Azad Khan.

Extracts from my diary

28 June. We were off. The last few days and nights were devoted to dividing up 750 kg of food and equipment into 30 porter loads and stowing them in our two Volkswagen trucks. Ahead of us was a sort of private rally involving seven days and seven nights, and 7500 km of asphalt, dust road and concrete tracks through the Balkans and over the steppes and deserts of Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The driver was changed every four to six hours, according to the difficulty of the section.

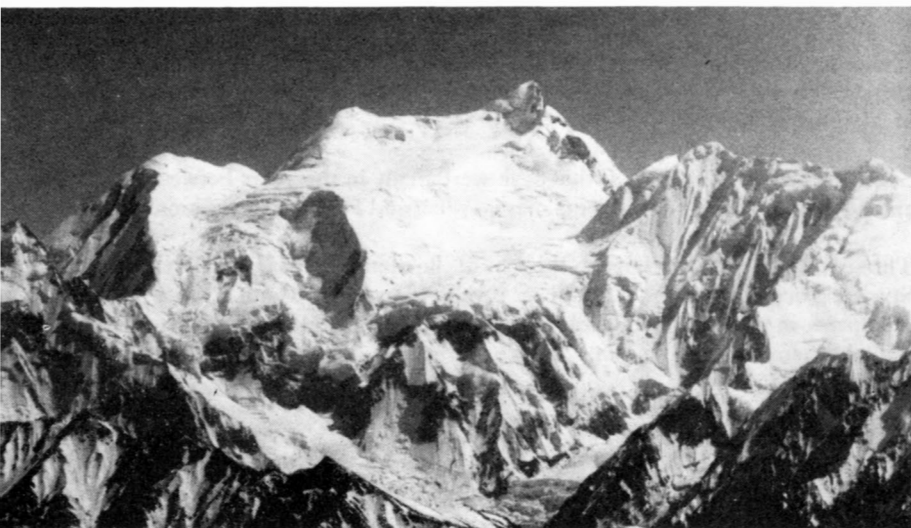
The silhouettes of the celebrated mosques of Istanbul lay behind us, and the glaciers and snow-fields of the volcanic mountains of Ararat and Demavend glistened in the moonlight.

4 July. At the border post between Persia and Afghanistan, we awaited the arrival of the sun, the police and the customs authorities. The desert wind drifted dust over the track and tangled the hair of the hippies, whom we encountered all along the route. These people from all parts of Europe tramp and hitch-hike their way with minimal expenditure for 10,000–15,000 km for months on end and all have a common aim—Nepal with its green valleys, the Sherpa villages and golden pagodas below the snows of the Himalaya.

26 July. We have reached our Base Camp, a couple of tents on the Chogolungma glacier at a height of 4200 m and 10 km from Malubiting.

After a journey of 500 km along an old caravan route, part of the celebrated silk road, our three jeeps took us over a pass of 4200 m and through the desert gorges of the Indus valley to Skardu, the capital of the province of Baltistan, the Pakistan section of Kashmir. Having assembled 31 local porters each

carrying 26 kg of equipment and food for $1\frac{1}{2}$ months, we trudged for 60 km through the sand and stone deserts of the Shigar and Basha valleys until we reached the oasis of Arandu at a height of 4200 m at the snout of the Chogolungma glacier. It took another four days to traverse the 40-km glacier to the site of our Base Camp.



24 *North flank of the Malubiting group* This and next photo: H. Schindlbacher

During the next ten days we had to work out a 12-km route through the moraines and the crevasses of the glacier in order to reach the foot of the great ice-slopes and ridges of Malubiting. We were obliged to carry loads of 20–25 kg, make tracks through the snow, cut steps in the ice-slopes, erect two high camps and fix ropes on a difficult rock buttress. For more than a month we maintained a wearisome struggle against the steep snow-slopes and ridges in a wilderness of snow, ice and rock, faced with heat, cold, storms and lack of oxygen.

14 August. Camp 2 at 5850 m. We have been confined to our two tents for six days and five nights owing to a monsoon storm. The wind is tearing at the struts and walls of the tents and driving the snow horizontally over the narrow ice-saddle on which the camp is situated. Our food is almost out and tomorrow we will have to go down to a lower camp.

22 August. Both tents are sited on a snow terrace at 6550 m in the midst of crevasses and séracs. We left Base Camp three days ago and having passed through intermediate camps, reached this point whence we hope to make a bid for the summit. We overcame the key point of the climb yesterday, a 200-m rock buttress on the N ridge, buffeted by wind and snow. Today the weather was excellent and we crossed the first portion of the summit plateau and were able once more to use skis.



25 *On the north-east ridge of Malubiting*

It is 10pm and for the past three hours I have been busy melting snow for tea and soup. Despite the great exertion, solar radiation and lack of oxygen, we have excellent appetites, a sign that we are very well acclimatised. We shall only have four hours sleep tonight, as we have to be up at 2am to make preparations for the bid for the top, i.e. cooking, eating and dressing. Any activity at this height takes time—even thinking! We hope to get away by 5 or 6 o'clock.

23 August. An icy cold morning and a cloudless sky over the whole chain of the Karakoram. Hilmar started first at 5.30, followed by Kurt and Hanns; I left camp half an hour later. We were about 900 m below the summit, which was about $3\frac{1}{2}$ –4 km distant as the crow flies. Hilmar and I made tracks in deep powder-snow. The terrain posed no problems and we were able to use skis up to 7100 m. We waited for Hanns and made some tea. We were now 300 m below the summit with about another two hours to go. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon Hilmar and I stepped on to the top of Malubiting. Hanns, followed by Kurt, arrived half an hour later.

It was dead calm. We sat for two hours on a small terrace a few metres below the summit above the s face. Six thousand metres below us we could see the Indus emerging from its 120-km-long gorge. Little white clouds sailed between the peaks. Over to the E the imposing ice pyramid of K2, the second highest summit in the world, soared above a chaos of glaciers, ridges and peaks. To the S, on the other side of the Indus valley could be seen the white mass of the N face of Nanga Parbat.

8 September. A 'Fokker-Friendship' rolled along the runway of Skardu airfield, past yellow sand dunes, took off and disappeared between the rock walls of the Indus valley.

We were flying s at about 5000–6000 m between the summits of the Karakoram. Then we dipped down into the hot and moist air of the Punjab plains. The snow peaks towering above the desert valleys of Kashmir over the horizon disappeared.