

Excursions & Climbs from the Karakoram Highway

Doug Scott

Plates 15–17

We left Britain on 18 June 1985 for the Karakoram with the intention of climbing rock pinnacles in Hunza, Rakaposhi N face, and Nanga Parbat from the south. We failed on all of these but did climb Diran (7273m) and several minor summits.

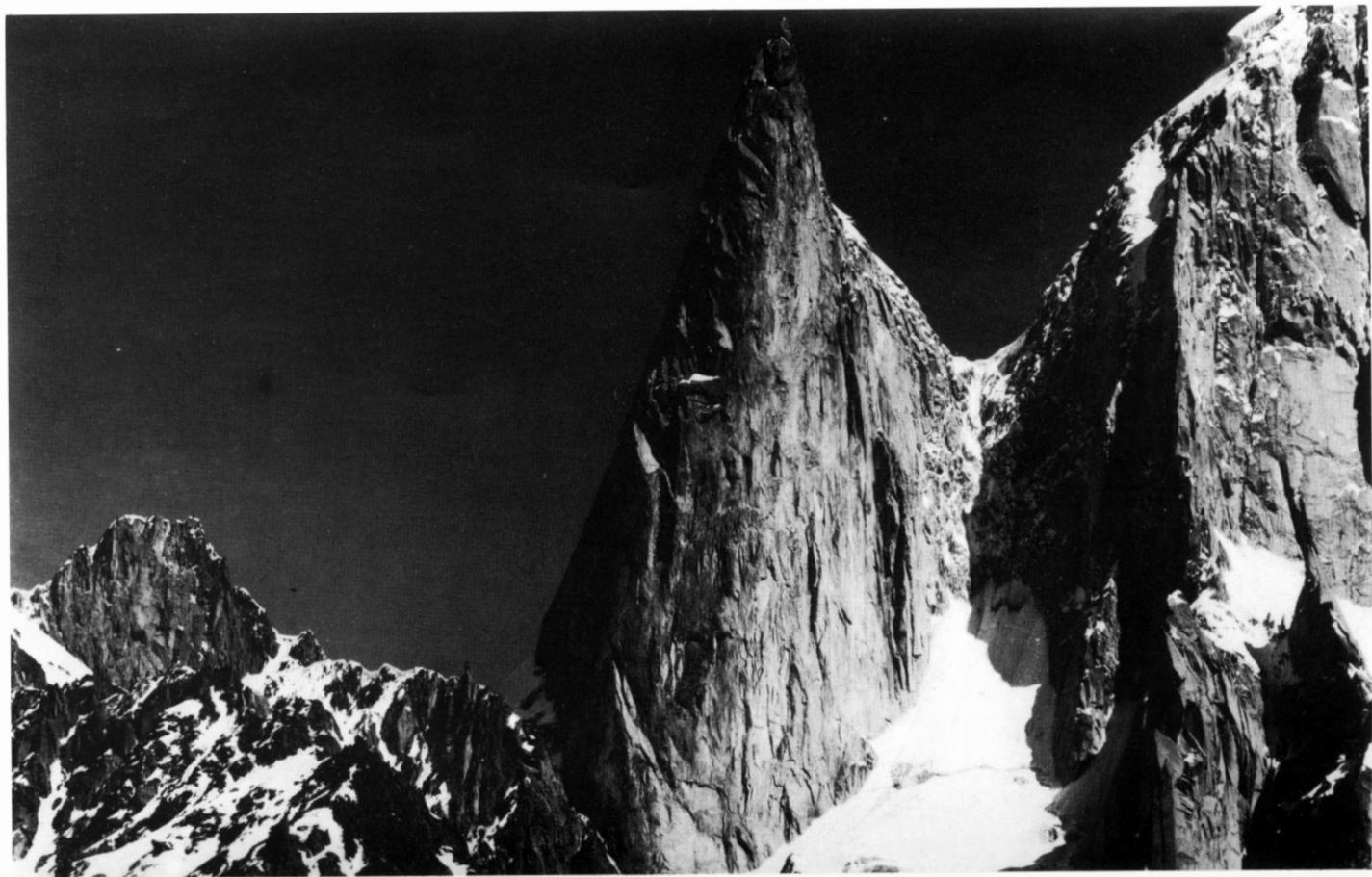
Heat and disease severely weakened the party, a situation exacerbated by being constantly on the move establishing four different base camps and, to a lesser extent, by problems with porters.

For three days and nights we travelled from Karachi to Islamabad lying on the equipment between the steel sides of an ancient Bedford truck. Travelling from south to north with the sun at its zenith, stops were frequent to escape the heat of this mobile oven and to cool down in irrigation water and at Coca Cola stalls. Icelandic climber Helgi Benediktsson was our first casualty. He had to remain in Islamabad for 10 days in the care of the British Embassy staff whilst he recovered from severe vomiting and stomach pain.

After travelling up the Karakoram Highway we reached Karimabad on 30 June where the team split into two groups. One group (Michael Scott, Alastair Reid, Snaevar Guomundson (Iceland)) went up to the Passu Glacier area. The rest of us (Mark Miller, Sean Smith, Stephen Sustad (USA), Greg Child (Australia), Nazir Sabir (Pakistan & LO) and myself went up to camp 3 hours above Karimabad on a pasture at 2400m by the Ultar glacier. After waiting for fresh snow to clear, all but Nazir climbed (in two days) up a steep, dangerous couloir to a col beneath Bubli-Mo-Tin (6000m) a 1000m rock pinnacle SW of Bojohaghur Duan Asir. General lethargy prevailed, as everyone had diarrhoea and Greg was passing blood. Stephen and myself climbed a minor peak to the south of our col but with no enthusiasm. We retreated, dodging stonefall, down the couloir. Nazir, his fiancée, Fumi, from Japan and our cook Mohammed narrowly escaped a huge avalanche on a goat track above Base Camp. Many goats were not so lucky.

Back in Karimabad we took Greg to the local hospital — which was full of local children, also with intestinal infections. Temperatures at mid-day were over 40°C and remained high for several weeks — in the Hunza valley reaching 47°C. The Passu team returned also suffering from the heat and infection.

We moved our gear to Minapin and set off up to Diran. Clive and Sue Davies (Canada), two trekking friends, returned home as Sue was suffering from diarrhoea and severe dehydration. After 5 hours walking (spread over 2 days) we camped beneath the NE ridge of Rakaposhi in the ablation valley by the Minapin glacier at about 2400m. The 51 Nagar porters demanded £750 for this carry some of which we agreed to pay then and to discuss paying the rest with



15 Bubliko-tin (6000m) S face which was first climbed by Patrick Cordier from the right via the coloir and the col.

Photo: Doug Scott

the local police chief on our return. An ugly incident ensued with them threatening us with sticks. Knowing that some German trekkers had been murdered by Nagars on a nearby glacier, we paid up. Later Nazir went down to fight a court case in Islamabad and *en route* reported the incident. Seven Nagars were put in jail. Periodically we were visited by the police and local leaders who informed us that the prisoners would be flogged and possibly jailed for six months. By this time Terry Mooney, QC, had arrived fresh from defending Irish terrorists in Belfast. He went down to plead for the Nagars on our behalf and succeeded in securing their release. Eventually this was settled on the basis that Minapin to Base Camp at the Minapin glacier, being an 8 hour carry, counted as one day only. Not long after Terry had to return home when an old knee injury put him out of action. Greg, Stephen and Snaevor also departed as their condition became worse.

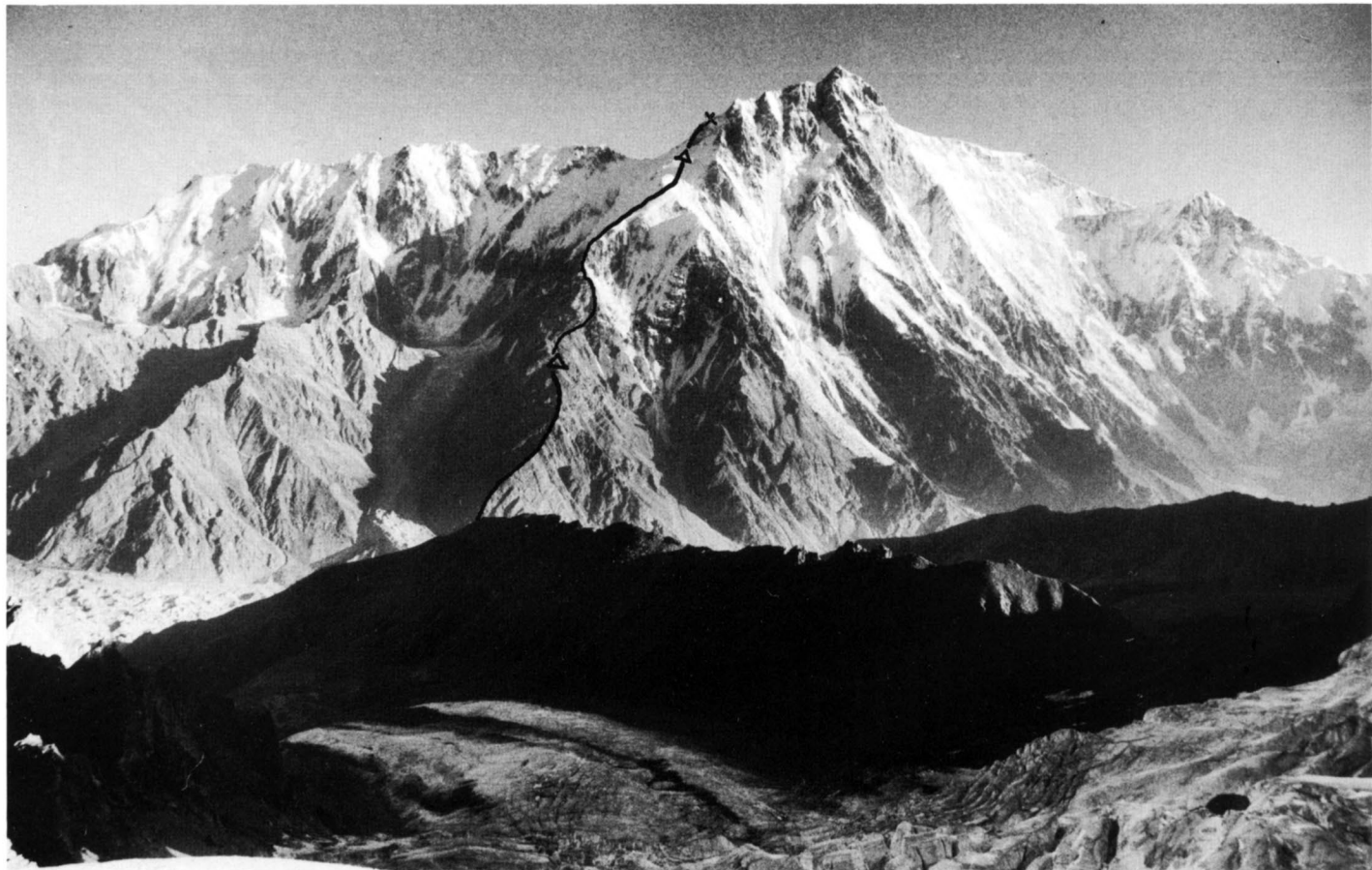
Back at Base Camp, Mark made a fine solo ascent of Pt 5677 which lies due north of the N col of Diran, making this climb from the SE. Helgi was now in better health as were Mark, Michael, Alastair and myself. We moved up the Minapin glacier to camp at 4000m. From there we climbed up the original route of Diran in a two-day push to the summit. The same route was climbed the day before by Eddi Kobelmueler's Austrian Expedition. We descended to our bivouac some 600m down the WNW ridge. Helgi was unable to reach the summit with us so he went up next day with an Austrian climber whilst I waited just below the ridge for his return. Three days later Nazir returned from court to climb up with Sean to the summit plateau — bad weather prevented them reaching the actual summit. At last we were able to stretch ourselves with a few days climbing in the cold clear air. The weather was superb and from the WNW ridge we had fine views of the SE side of Rakaposhi and all the peaks between Diran and Nanga Parbat to the south — white above the heat and dust.

Meanwhile my wife, Jan with my two daughters, Martha (12) and Rosie (6), Helgi's wife, Anna and son Johnny (9), Sue Duff, Frankie Morton and David Marshall arrived at Base Camp to join the expedition for the next few weeks.

Four of the Austrian team climbed the unclimbed E summit (7010m) of Rakaposhi *via* the NNE ridge — we had planned to go to the main summit this way. Eddi Kobelmueler staggered into camp late at night telling us of this fine climb but also that right at the end of the difficulties one of his team had slipped and was now in Advanced Base Camp with serious head injuries. He asked us to go up with pain killers and do what we could to rescue him whilst the Austrians' LO went for a helicopter. Early next morning Mark, Michael and I arrived to find the injured man was dead.

We lost interest in this side of the mountain and in climbing in general, having just also heard of the deaths of our friends Roger Baxter-Jones and Don Whillans. Instead, we decided to explore the unclimbed S flank of Rakaposhi but poor weather and high porter rates changed our minds in favour of Nanga Parbat.

We arrived at Base Camp on the Rupal side of Nanga Parbat on 12 August after a harrowing tractor and jeep ride to the road-head followed by two days on foot and horseback. Our Base Camp was on lush grass surrounded by juniper trees by a clear stream gurgling out of the rocks at the foot of the S face. On 15



16 *Nanga Parbat S face (Rupal).*

Photo: Doug Scott

August Ali, Michael, David, Nazir, Martha and myself went up to the W side of Rupal Peak. After 3 bivouacs and some Grade-3 ice climbing we were established some 250m from the summit. All but Martha, who had bad stomach pains, and myself went to the summit via this new route.

Mark and Sean attempted a nearby un-named peak but retired, lethargic from a recurrence of intestinal problems. Mark left after realizing he was fighting a losing battle with ill-health. None of us were in very good shape so Michael, Ali, Nazir and myself decided to go for the SW ridge route on Nanga Parbat. We climbed appalling loose rock to camp at 6400m. Nebi and Mohammed, our two Hunza friends, helped us with load carrying part way and then descended. The next day we reached 7300m in a storm with hurricane-force winds. We backed down 150m and bivouaced, but Ali was very ill so we descended next day to Base Camp. A few days later our very much depleted party hired horses and galloped out to the road-head.

At home, before the Expedition, this grandiose plan had seemed quite feasible with relative ease of access provided by the Karakoram Highway and jeep roads up the side valleys. But in practice it had proved a disjointed expedition and one during which we were constantly contracting illness. The water supply in Karimabad was particularly suspect this year and it was exceptionally hot. The year before, most of us had walked the 14 days up to Makalu Base Camp (Nepal) and climbed six peaks including Baruntse, Chamlang and nearly Makalu. That had proved a far better experience as there had been a steady acclimatization on the walk-in, during which time we gained strength, and a rhythm of life developed more conducive to climbing than had been the case in 1985.

By early September we were all back home to lick our wounds, pay off our debts and to thank all the sponsors and friends who made it possible for us to visit Pakistan.

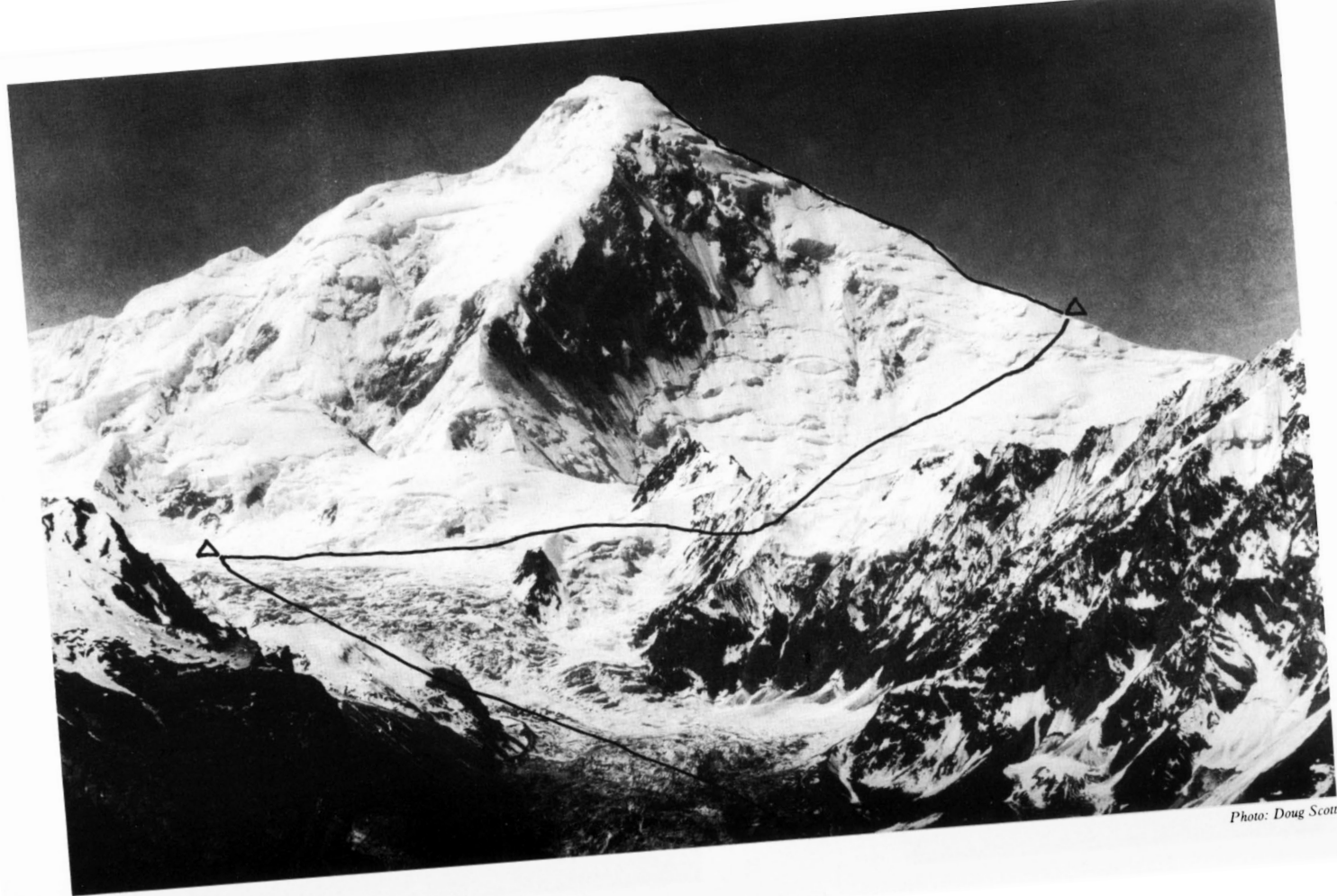


Photo: Doug Scott

1982 - NW face