
Karakoram 1987

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Poor weather afflicted the area between May and early August. Subsequently there was some good weather, but it seems that only a few parties were in the field to take advantage of it. Thick snow lay to quite low altitudes until well into July.

Early success was achieved by a Swiss party on Broad Peak (8087m). Norbert Joos reached the top on 29 May and Ernst Muller and Bruno Honegger on 7 June. Their approach march had been made in particularly snowy conditions from Urdukas. A number of other parties were less fortunate. Yugoslavs, who reached 7500m, Mexicans, two French parties led by Louis Adoubert, the climbing Abbé, and by Pierre Mazeaud failed, as did Norwegians led by Hans Christian Doseth's sister Ragnild Amardsen and a British party involving Richard Falley, Norman Croucher, John Watt and leader Mark Hallum. On 29 August Josep Estruch and Luis Vandellós reached the fore-summit (8030m) when their six-member Catalan party decided that the snow was too dangerous to continue on the ascent of the main top.

Even in the better weather of mid-August, K2 defeated all comers. A note from Doug Scott on the British-American expedition to K2's E side appears at the end of this section. A French party led by Martine Rolland, the first woman guide in Chamonix, withdrew after her hand was smashed by a falling stone on the Abruzzi, and a Japanese group withdrew from 6900m on the same route. A bold line on the W face attracted Voytek Kurtyka and Jean Troillet. They waited 45 days for suitable weather and eventually made their attempt in early August. Bad weather on 9 August forced them down. Earlier, Erhard Loretan, Troillet's companion on the fast alpine-style ascent of the Hornbein Couloir of Everest in 1986, had been prevented from joining this venture by a winter accident. Subsequently two parties remained. A Japanese-Pakistani expedition tried the Abruzzi in mid-August, reaching the Shoulder, and a group of Basques climbed the SSE spur to the same point. A total of eight climbers then reached 'The Bottleneck' at 8300m before worsening weather forced them down. Sadly, Akira Suzuki fell to his death during the retreat.

In the Gasherbrums, the same poor weather and hostilities with the Indians proved hazardous. A New Zealand party was unable to climb on Baltoro Kangri because of the Indian military threat. Four Pakistani army climbers died in an avalanche on Gasherbrum 1 and their attempt, with those (seemingly) by Japanese and New Zealand parties, failed on the same mountain, as did that by a Spanish party.

On Gasherbrum 2 there was more success. On 25 June three Americans, Phil Powers, Michael Collins and Malachy Miller, reached the top, followed on the same day by Jean-Pierre Hefti, a Swiss member of the British-New Zealand expedition, and by Germans Sigi and Gabi Hupfauer. Hefti lost his life

attempting a ski descent from 7500m, slipping on ice during the diagonal section on the route to the S face ski-descended by Michel Metzger and Thierry Renard in 1985. On 9 July Guy Halliburton, Iain Peter and Donald Stewart reached the top. Peter then ski'd from 7500m to 7000m that day and completed the descent on skis next day to 6000m on the S Gasherbrum Glacier. In the same period Michel Dacher (54) reached the top, apparently with Ulrich Schmidt. It was the German guide's tenth 8000m peak, all without oxygen.

In the August improvement New Zealanders Carol McDermott and Lydia Bradley, after abandoning attempts on Gasherbrum 1, made a successful ascent of Gasherbrum 2 with Basques Juan Oyarzabel and Aixo Apellaniz. This is the first ascent of an 8000m peak by New Zealand women. Another success involved Eugene Berger of Luxembourg and Italians Sergio Martini, Fausto de Stefani and Mauricia Giordana. In a first attempt Berger's companion Pascale Noël (Belgian) withdrew on 30 July from 6600m. The second alpine-style push began on 5 August and succeeded on the 8th. Berger narrowly failed on Nanga Parbat (by 30m) in 1986, and Martini and de Stefani have now climbed five 8000m peaks.

Fortunes were similarly mixed elsewhere in the 8000m league. The Italian Quota 8000 Expedition succeeded on the Kinshofer route on the Diamir face of Nanga Parbat. Tullio Vidoni and Soro Dorotei reached the top in three days' alpine-style on 5 July. Benoit Chamoux then soloed the route in 23 hours, as he had done on K2 and Broad Peak in 1986. A Spanish expedition also succeeded. Pedro Exposito, Domingo Hernandez, Juan Martinez and Fernando Alvarez reached the top. A Japanese expedition succeeded in mid-August. Their countrymen were less favoured on Rakaposhi. Munchiko Yamamoto led a party of three via the N flank to the N peak (7010m), but bad weather prevented them from continuing towards the main summit.

In general, British parties were more numerous in the fields of exploration of smaller peaks and new routes, as were some other parties operating under trekking regulations. In the 7000m category was the magnificent ascent of the NW pillar of Spantik. This 'Golden Pillar' has attracted travellers crossing the Barpu Glacier above Nagar for years. The expedition comprised Liz Allen, Phil Butler, Bruce Craig (NZ), Dr John English, Mick Fowler and Victor Saunders. After initial build-up and acclimatization the latter pair climbed the route, which was over 2000m long and very steep throughout the upper reaches. The top was attained during a nine-day push on 11 August, from whence they came back via a snow-ice spur two kilometres to the west of the route of ascent. Their success is the more impressive for its completion within a six-week leave from the UK – a second winner in succession for the Nick Estcourt Award.

In the same Hunza-Nagar region other parties were active. John Sylvester and Mark Charlton tried the steep face of the granite spire of Bibliotin. This is an 1100m rock wall on a spire of around 5700m. The summit has been climbed by a line of least resistance, but the face remains a major challenge, defeating this party as it has done British explorations in 1986. Further to the north Richard Haszko's group succeeded on the fine snow peak of Tupopdam (6061m). John Stevenson and Andy Cave reached the top in early July. The Shimshal Valley also saw traffic. The Plymouth Polytechnic Group

reached the Kurdopin Glacier and climbed a 5000m-plus peak on the right bank. In the Yazghil Glacier area Clair and Peter Foster climbed Yazghil Sar North (5820m), and Jack Brindle, Earnie McGlashan and John O'Reilly climbed Yazghil Sar South (5920m).

The Thames Valley MC expedition to the Koro Valley was in similar vein. Setting up Base Camp in June they waited long for good weather. At last Dai Bowman, Martin Hignell and Dave Wright repeated Cavalry Peak and made the first ascent of Mongouo (5900m) via the S ridge.

Further east, Stephen Venables, Duncan Tunstall and Phil Bartlett trekked up the Biafo Glacier in mid-July, and Venables and Tunstall climbed P5979's S peak between 23 and 25 July. Venables returned later and climbed the Central Peak on 24 August. This peak is on the Biafo-Solu watershed. In late July a crossing was made from there to Shimshal.

In the same period the Cambridge-St Andrews Expedition climbed west of Hobluk. They climbed Ghur, Hobluk and the Goblin, and did work on the sexing of the ablation valley willows. As so often, changeable weather favoured the flexible and lightweight, and disadvantaged those tied to higher and more technical objectives.

This was well illustrated in the Latok range, where the bigger peaks exceed 7000m. Ted Howard led a powerful siege of the unclimbed NW ridge of Latok 1. At 7145m this is the highest Latok, and second only to The Ogre (Baintha Brakk) within the group. It has been climbed once from the south via a long and difficult route from the Baintha Lukpar Glacier. On that Italian ascent in August 1977 there was a large number of climbers and much fixed rope was used, as was the case on the Ogre. The NW ridge has now been attempted in 1976 (Japanese), 1977 (UK), 1978 (UK), 1985 (Japanese), and again in 1987.

The party consisted of Ted Howard, Bill Barker, Mo Anthoine, Joe Brown, Dr John Hancock, Paul de Mengel, Brian Mullan, Paul Nunn and Captain Farooq Azan. The advance party in late May was much hampered by heavy snow, and the traditional Base Camp site was never occupied for that reason. Advanced Base was set up below the great col and the slope to the Latok Col was fixed, with a camp set up at 6000m in early July. Despite poor weather all the British members except Dr Hancock, who had to return early, climbed on the ridge above 6000m to a camp set up below rock barriers around 6600m, and steep technical sections were fixed to allow continued efforts in poor weather and dangerous snow conditions. With Brown, Anthoine and de Mengel in the top camp, and Barker, Nunn, Mullan and Howard supplying it, all boded well for the attempt on the technically hard upper section of the ridge which no party has yet broached. This came to nought when the heavy snowfall of 10-15 July caused an avalanche which swept away the fixed ropes above Camp 3, and made all the lower sections very hazardous. Without a very long sojourn at Base Camp to allow conditions to settle, success remained remote and the expedition was abandoned. Interestingly, a two-man Swiss party likewise trying technically hard climbs on the Ogre's Thumb and elsewhere made little progress. A French attempt on the N ridge of Latok 2 from the Chokto appears to have fared no better.

The lesson appears to be that technical climbs, on higher peaks especially

but also on lower rock spires, are unlikely to succeed in bad weather. Success is most assured where high mobility can be achieved, a decreasing likelihood when the climbing is genuinely hard.

Elsewhere in the technical vein, Michel Piola, Stephane Schaffter, Michel Facquet and Patrick Delale completed an impressive new route on the Trango Tower. Over 1100m long, it was graded 6c (French) and A4, and Facquet made a Parapent descent from summit to Base Camp.

More British 'trekking' groups were active in the Hushe Valley. Simon Yates's group did some good routes in the August good weather, and, though Pat Littlejohn and Steve Jones missed that, they climbed Crested Peak and Raven's Pyramid, virgin mountains on the Buesten Glacier, a tributary of the South Chogolisa Glacier. The Pyramid had 23 pitches of fine granite climbing, with some of 5c (UK, about French 6c), and none easier than 4b (French 5b).

It is evident that Karakoram climbing has hived off into several quite distinct schools. The most conformist activity is the repetition of well-known 'ordinary routes' on the great peaks, in most cases within the Messner 'League Table' of 8000ers. Linked to that is speed ascent, where athletic achievement substitutes for other forms of novelty.

Apart from that, there continues the search for novelty in the form of new routes on peaks already climbed, especially high ones, and exploration involving first ascents of smaller mountains, or the climbing of technical, difficult routes on them. This is reviving – and a very good thing too!

Please note that this account was compiled without the usual 'official' information from Tourism Division of the Government of Pakistan, as that had not arrived by late December. Thanks are therefore due to *Mountain Magazine* and its correspondents, and in particular to John Porter.

Expedition plans for 1988 indicate a continuing interest in Britain in both the largest peaks and a large number of innovatory 'new-routing' ventures.

H Adams Carter adds:

An (American) expedition including Phil Peabody made a new route on Lupkilla Brakk and the first ascent of Uzum Brakk. [For the British attempt on Uzum Brakk (Conway's Ogre), see *AJ*86, 191–197, 1981.]

Doug Scott adds:

On 16 June, Tim McCartney-Snape (Australia), Greg Child (Australia), Steve Swenson (USA), Phil Ershler (USA), Michael Scott and myself (from Britain) arrived in Islamabad to begin the journey north, to the E side of K2. The American lads brought with them Carolyn Gunn, who was to be our head cook with Rassoul and Fidor, two Balti expedition men from the Hushe Valley.

We were accompanied by a support trek of 10 trekkers organized by Karakoram Experience who would be contributing towards the finances of the expedition as would a film unit, also walking in with us to Base Camp. They were using our permit to K2 to film this part of the Karakoram mountain range for a Hollywood production of a film entitled 'K2'. By regulation we had to

have two liaison officers, one the excellent Captain Asim Nafumi, and for the film team the first woman liaison officer to be fielded in Pakistan, Shad Meena, who added to our enjoyment of the walk-in.

On 20 June we set off walking from Dassu. 11 days later we arrived at Base Camp (5000m). On 1 and 2 July some of our trekking friends went with us along the upper Godwin Austen glacier, through the ice-fall past the Abruzzi Spur route, to 5500m, and then returned to Base Camp with the film crew. Shad Meena accompanied them.

On 4 July Mike and Stephen ski'd up to a point opposite the E face of K2 and established our Advanced Base Camp. During the following days we all ferried loads up to this camp in between snow-storms. The E face did not look inviting with all the avalanches streaming down it, and huge slabs of snow poised to break off above the prominent buttress we hoped to climb. Still, it was early days and we hoped that the winds and the hot sun between storms would improve the situation whilst we acclimatized.

On 8 July we ski'd up to Windy Gap and back to Advanced Base Camp. On 9 July we climbed some 900m up the side of Peak 6812. It was not possible to climb again until 17 July, because of deep falls of snow. On the 17th and 18th we went up on to Skiang Kangri and then decided that the E face of K2 would remain too dangerous for us to climb this year, so we retired to Base Camp, taking down in one carry all the gear, food and fuel we had brought up to our Advanced Base Camp.

We acclimatized some more on Broad Peak as far as we could go in the deep snow (to c7000m). The snow continued falling off and on until the end of the month, at which point Tim, Michael and myself walked out, arriving in Islamabad on 7 August. Steve, Phil and Greg stayed on for three more weeks attempting the Polish South Pillar Route, reaching 7000m, then the South Pillar route which Jean Afanassieff, Roger Baxter-Jones, Andy Parkin and I had climbed to the Shoulder in 1983. They eventually abandoned that route at 7000m and the mountain towards the end of August, because of more snow-storms and high winds above.