
Karakoram 1988

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(Plates 105, 106)

The summer seems to have been marked by relatively good early weather for high snow peaks, but conditions were poor for high-altitude climbing in July and early August, causing disappointment on K2 to all parties and some problems elsewhere. Nevertheless, there was a continued trend towards creative ascents of new routes, on peaks varying from just below 8000m to small technical and not-so-technical mountains.

The year began with the Polish-British-Canadian first attempt on K2 in winter. Bad weather caused immense difficulty in getting equipment to Base Camp, which delayed matters greatly. Andrzej Zawada, veteran of so many winter schemes, led the 22-member team. They faced high winds and temperatures down to -50°C . A high point of 7350m on the Abruzzi ridge was reached, but mostly the conditions seem to have been too bad to allow much progress. Roger Mear, Mike Woolridge and John Barry took part, though John did not go to Base Camp and Mike was ill.

The first winter ascent of Broad Peak was something of a consolation prize. Maciej Berbeka and Alek Lwow set out on 3 March on an alpine-style ascent of the ordinary route. On 6 March Lwow decided to stay at a camp at 7700m after the exhausting struggle to reach that point through deep snow. Berbeka reached the top that night at 6pm and got down to 7900m before being forced to stop. Next morning he rejoined Lwow in poor weather and they made the descent safely. Both suffered frostbite.

During the summer 57 expeditions took to the field. 38 went to the Skardu district, with 11 on Nanga Parbat and eight in the Gilgit area. Japanese climbers mounted 10 expeditions, West Germans and French six each, Britain five, Italy and the USA four each and Poland and South Korea three each. Austria, Spain, Switzerland and Canada had two each, and there were eight others, some bi-national in make-up. 26 expeditions claimed successes. Notably Czech, Yugoslav and Polish expeditions took along greater numbers of climbers, thereby enabling more people to participate in the activity than the typically very small British expedition.

K2 repulsed all comers, with some good weather early on, and bad from early July. A spirited attempt by 12 Yugoslavs led by Tomaz Jamnik sought to repeat the 1986 Polish route on the SSW pillar. Three camps were established, and 3300m of rope were in place when Andrzej Stremfelj and Filip Bence reached a high point of 8100m on 13 July. They had intended to set up a Camp 4 about 100m higher at the top of a big gully and try for the summit thereafter. Instead, bad weather forced them down and they were unable to try again seriously because of poor weather. Indeed, complete Camps 2 and 3 and the ropes had to be abandoned.

Americans Pete Athans, Steve Matous, Andrew Lapkass and the British Al and Adrian Burgess had the same basic problem on the Abruzzi. A June attempt reached 7500m, but five tries in spells between bad weather in July and early August had to be aborted. Similar problems defeated Catalans led by Jordi Guell, and Rob Hall's New Zealand group. It is little consolation to know that things were equally bad on the Xinjiang side N ridge. Pierre Beghin and five companions tried the route, but after the attainment of a high point of 7600m in July the weather was never good for more than three days at a time. Beghin went solo beyond 8000m, but only just managed to return in the subsequent storm.

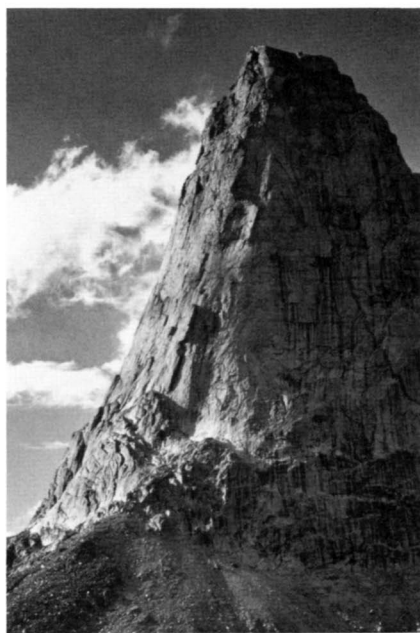
On Broad Peak, by contrast, there were several successful ascents. The mountain was climbed by two Japanese teams, by South Koreans and by an Italo-Romanian party. Sadly, a porter, Hussain, was killed when he fell loaded into the Braldu River on 10 August. On the mountain there was another casualty when Jang Il Chung was avalanched from a steep slope at 8000m on 20 August. He was leader of a four-man South Korean expedition, three of whom reached the summit that day at 2.30pm.

Gasherbrum 1 was climbed via the SW face by Czechs led by Robert Galfy. Others had less luck. George Miranda's small Mexican expedition reached 7200m. Jorge Luis Brito then died of pulmonary oedema and the party retreated. Another party led by Ethan Van Matre tried the German route on the N face, but after early good conditions could make no progress in the subsequent bad weather. Nearby an American party led by Gary Speer wished to repeat the American route, but after long initial delays were prevented from going to the start of the American original route for military reasons.

In consequence they went on to Gasherbrum 2. Phil Boyer had altitude troubles and came down with Dr Chip Woodland. Gary Speer and Gary Silver went on. At Camp 2 Silver felt ill, and Speer continued alone, reaching 7950m before returning exhausted in deteriorating weather. While descending he met Silver going up with Dr Roland Willenbrock, a Swiss member of a Canadian expedition. They reached Camp 3, where they were trapped for some days in bad weather in which a metre of snow fell. On 9 July they started to come down, but at 7000m Silver collapsed and despite efforts to get him down he died. Altogether 10 parties tried Gasherbrum 2, making it the most popular peak after Nanga Parbat. Of course the variety of approaches is less, with almost all parties climbing on the Austrian standard route of 1956, as were the Americans above. Six parties succeeded, many of them in favourable June conditions. Bernard Muller's French commercial trip of 17 people allowed Georges Lozat, Jordi Pons, J P Renaud, B Vallet, Jacky Pêche and Muller to reach the top on 22 and 23 June. Next day Marc Buscail, Pascal Hittinger and Henri Albet also succeeded. A subsequent attempt at a mono-ski 'surf' descent by Henri Albet on 25 June ended in his death when he fell 1300m from the first turn. Later Belgians Jan Vanhees, Ingrid Baeyens and Lut Vивиjs were held up by bad weather in late July. On 4 August they reached Camp 1 (6000m) and in the next two days climbed the Austrian Spur, finding Silver's body between Camps 2 and 3. On 7 August deep snow stopped them near 7600m, but next day they reached the top after an exhausting time with deep snow. Lut Vивиjs thus succeeded on her third 8000m peak (Dhaulagiri 1 1982; Nanga Parbat 1986). All in all, Gasherbrum 2



105. *Karakoram: Gasherbrum 1.* (p 253)



106. *Karakoram: The Ogre's Thumb.* (p 253)



107. *The North Face of Cho Oyu.* (p 262)



108. *SE face of Pk 6292m on the S shoulder of Mana (7272m).* (p 267)

was kind to women in 1988. Japan's womens' expedition was also successful by the normal route, with an 11-member team led by Ms Shiori Hashimoto. An attempt on the peak led by Jean Pierre Fidèle was less happy. Michael Basson died on 16 July from pulmonary oedema, though the party reached the top. Another ascent was by Max Eiselin's Swiss guided expedition of 12 people, and yet another by two Savoyards. Thus the standard route on Gasherbrum 2 remains overpopulated, with around 10 parties on one route at various times, five of them French, and several of them large commercial guided groups. It seems remarkable that five out of six French expeditions to the Karakoram went on the same mountain on the same route!

Of course invention is expensive in time and more uncertain of reward. Thus, despite it being a second try, Dai Lampard, Phil Thornhill and their party failed on the unclimbed and difficult SW ridge of Gasherbrum 4, stopping around 7000m at a steep rock barrier. This is a formidable possibility, with much more difficulty remaining between high point and summit.

Another innovative attempt was made by Mike Searle's group on the Baltoro peak of Biale (6730m) which is unclimbed. Between 1 and 6 July Searle, Mark Miller, Sean Smith, Simon Yates and Nick Groves found a route through the ice-fall at the head of the Biale glacier, across a wide snow basin and up ice and rock to the Cathedral Biale ridge around 6000m. Camp 3 was set up at 6000m, 200m north of the Cathedral. A point was reached under the summit headwall at about 6250m when storm forced retreat. Bad weather stopped subsequent July attempts around 6000m.

Elsewhere enterprise paid off. W Kurtyka and E Loretan made the first ascent of the E face of the Trango Tower (wrongly called 'nameless' ever since Galen Rowell). Two attempts on this very steep wall were stopped after their initial beginning on 24 June. Eventually they succeeded on 13 July, after eight days of effective climbing. The route is 29 rope-lengths, 1100m ED plus, with six A3 pitches and much other artificial climbing, though mostly using nuts and friends. They fixed 600m of rope, but completed another of the Tower's great test-pieces. Later in the summer 10 German climbers led by Hartmut Münchenbach followed their route for 220m, then traversed to the south on the big snow-ledge to the Yugoslav route and finished up that. On 3 September Wolfgang Kraus, Jörg Wilz, Thomas Lipinski and Jörg Schneider reached the top. On 6 September Kurt Albert, Bernt Arnold, Wolfgang Güllich, Martin Leinauer, Hartmut Münchenbach and Martin Schwiersch succeeded. Güllich and Albert made a free ascent, grading the route UIAA VIII or VIII+. Subsequently Arnold sustained pelvic and rib fractures after falling into a crevasse and had to be helicoptered out, an unfortunate culmination of a rare trip for the East German sandstone ace.

Nearby on Uli Biaho (6290m) an Italian party did a new route on the S pillar, and made the second ascent of this steep tower. Rosana Manfrini, Maurizio Giordani and Kurt Wald completed the climb in five days between 17 and 21 June, grading the climb VII A3. Two routes were also done on El Castillo (5844m). These climb a face to a lower summit (5300m) with sections of 6B, and were done between 19 and 28 May. The main summit remains virgin. After the Uli Biaho route Giordani soloed the Great Tower of Trango

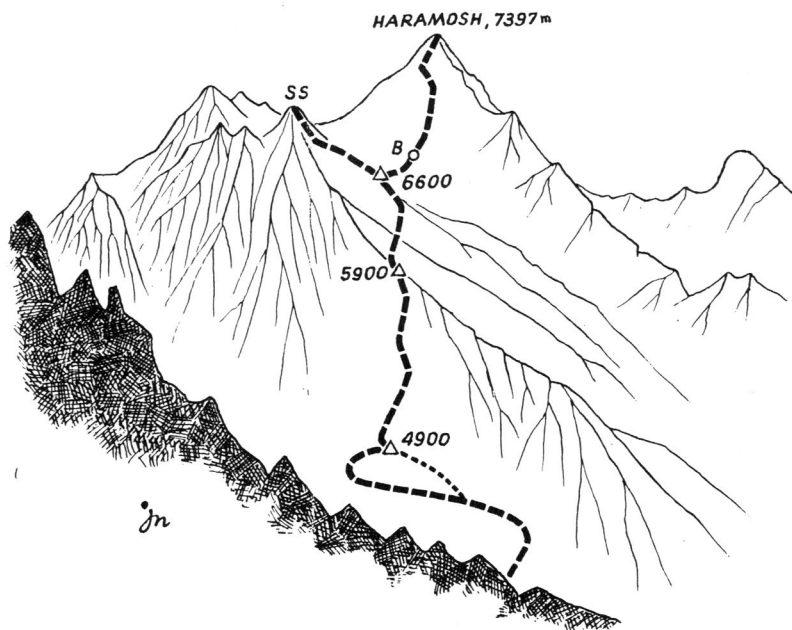
from the north side in nine hours, a 2000m route repeated by his friends afterwards.

Another Italian expedition climbed the far west peak of Masherbrum (7200m). It was led by Augusto Zanotti from Rome. In the Latoks Enrico Rosso, Marco Forcatura and Marco Marciani repeated the 1979 Japanese route on Latok 3 (6852m). They made the ascent alpine-style in near winter conditions in eight days, finishing on 15 June (VI and A2).

A West German party tried Baintha Brakk, the Ogre (7285m) but was not successful. Across the Biafo Glacier an Italian group climbed a fine pillar on Sosbun Spire 1, a peak of about 5500m. From Chokpiong they approached the west side of the range via the E branch of the Sosbun Glacier. An Advanced Base was made at 4350m on moraine in mid-August. They then climbed a steep pillar which had been tried by a Polish group led by Janusz Skorek in 1986. Their route was left of the Polish line. On 19–20 August 3500m were climbed and fixed with rope, in unstable weather. Then the weather cleared and on 21 and 22 August the final ascent was made, starting with a bivouac on a snow-field half-way up the pillar. A blizzard began on the last pitches, but Paulo Vital, the 24-year-old leader, G Battista Gianola (25), Adriano Carnati (25) and Daniele Bosisio (25) reached the top at 3pm. The route was 1400m long with magnificent climbing, including 35 pitches of V, VI or VI+ and A1. The descent was made on 22 and 23 August. One member, Miss Sonja Brambati (27), missed the climb after being ill on the first attempt. The area, visited about a decade ago by Mick Coffey, has dozens of hard smaller peaks and can be reached in three or four days from Dusso. It is significant that an Austrian party, led by Heinz Zak, tried the route earlier in the season; it was defeated by bad weather.

On the Hispar climbing parties were few. The best British effort of the year hereabouts was the ascent of Kunyang Kish (7852m) by a new route up the N ridge. After setting up Base on 22 June, the five-man party set up Camps 1 (5400m) and 2 (5800m), then rested at Base in bad weather. On 1 July Keith Milne, Mark Lowe, Andrew Wingfield and Julian Fisher returned to the ridge and a camp was subsequently set up at 6700m. There they were caught in bad weather for three days, after which Fisher felt ill, so he and Wingfield descended. Milne and Lowe continued over the 7000m Sod's Law Peak, aptly named by its first explorers Dave Wilkinson, Steve Venables and Phil Bartlett in 1980. They continued, with low winds, reaching the top on 13 July. It was a bold effort, favoured by the weather, and only the second ascent of this formidable peak, following that of Zawada's strong Polish team via the S ridge in August 1971. Interestingly, that route too was originally reconnoitred by a Pakistan-British party in 1962, though an attempt was called off when Dick Jones and Jimmy Mills were killed in a fall down the E face (*AJ*68, 100–107, 1963).

Elsewhere on the Hispar the big peaks repulsed the climbers. Jacques Kelle from Marseille led an 11-member party to Pumari Chich (7350m), and Herbert Tschochner from West Germany again with 11 people tried Distaghil Sar (7885m). Like a British attempt upon Malubiting led by David Harries, these efforts failed. Herbert Streibel's West German group of 15 climbed

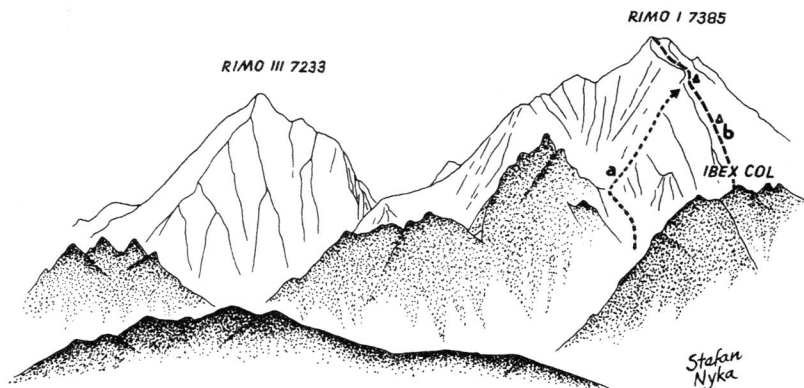


Spantik (7027m), and in a different vein Jamie Thin and a friend from Durham University did a route on the N face of one of the twin rock peaks at the eastern end of the Bal Chish massif, on the S wall of the Hispar. They climbed snow and ice runnels to a col and a rocky ridge to the top. How this relates to ascents of summits in this area by a Services expedition from the Kerolungma side is not known, but the route is almost certainly new despite these efforts, and climbs by the Poles in that region before their success on Kunyang Kish. Nearby too was the exploratory trek to the Gharesa Glacier, another cirque with many smaller unclimbed summits, led by Richard Hazko (UK).

Polish climbers led by Janusz Baranek made a major first, an ascent of the SW face of Haramosh from a base in the Ishkapal valley. This face, said to be 4000m high, had been reconnoitred by Polish climbers in 1984. Then two smaller peaks, Redam (5300m) and Godeli (5325m), were climbed. Base Camp was at 3200m, and higher camps were established at 4900m (29 June), 5900m (4 July) and 6600m (10 July). 3000m of rope was fixed up to this Camp 3. The lower part of the face was 50-degree ice, in a dangerous crevassed couloir. From Camp 1 to 2 was steep rock (V) and 70-degree ice in parts. From Camp 3, Jarosz Malczyk and Marek Pronobis crossed a dangerous hanging glacier and bivouacked at the foot of an ice-fall. Next day, after continuous climbing for 16 hours, they reached the top (7397m). This was the fourth ascent overall. On 30 July Baranek, Andrzej Mostek and Kazimierz Wszolek also reached the top, while other members Miroslaw Konewka and Jacek Wiltosinski reached one summit of Sari Sumari (c7000m), but were prevented by high wind and lack of time from going to the main summit.

The 10 expeditions to Nanga Parbat had varying fates. Three climbed the Diamir face: West Germans led by Heinrich Koch, another group led by Dr E Gundelach, and the Japan Research into High Mountains Expedition led by Haruyuki Endo. Efforts elsewhere were more innovative. On 25 June Francesco Mich, Constante Carpella and Angelo Giovannetti reached the top of a 2000m pillar in the centre of the N face. The pillar required four days' climbing, to a summit of 6550m. They judged the continuation too dangerous and retreated. Their pillar they called Pilastro Val di Fiemme. On the Rupal face Barry Blanchard, K Doyle, W Robinson and M Twight tried to repeat the Messner line of 1970. A storm appeared when they were at 7750m in the Merkl couloir, and they had to give up. They had climbed alpine-style over five days when the weather intervened on 13 July. Before that they made two fine new routes: the E arête of Laila (6095m) was done solo by Mark Twight (1800m TD) and the N face of Shgiri (66400m), by Blanchard, K Doyle and W Robinson. They also made an ascent of the Schell route on Nanga Parbat to 7000m, to acclimatize before their final try (Blanchard, Doyle, Twight). A South Korean party climbed to Rakhiot Peak by the 1953 route. Three camps preceded a successful ascent by Nam Kyu Hwang and Jong Cheol Kim on 18 June. The aim is to mount an expedition to the main peak in a future year. It is also reported that Peter Worgotter's Austrian expedition was successful, but Robert Renzler's Austrian group, Swiss, Italians and another American party failed. Late attempts on Nanga Parbat met very poor conditions in September. An American expedition led by Tom Mereness from Boulder left Gilgit on 29 August, setting up Base at 3700m in the upper Rupal valley on 8 September. They attempted the Schell route, but on 4 October the weather worsened, with much snow. The resultant avalanche conditions stymied further progress, and a South Korean expedition on the Diamir Face led by Il Hwan Park also reached their high point of around 7000m in mid-September.

Relatively few parties tried higher peaks to the west of the Karakoram Highway. Poles led by Piotr Mlotecki climbed the main summit of Batura Mustagh (7785m). From Base at 4000m on the Batokshi glacier moraines, three camps were established following the 1983 Koblmüller route. Attempts to climb Batura 1 West (7762m) failed. On 6 July Zygmund A Heinrich, Pawel Kubalski and Volker Stallbohm made a big push, sleeping at Camp 1 (4700m) and Camp 3 (6200m) and continuing alpine-style, using a tent for three bivouacs and a snow-hole for a last one. They reached the top on 13 July at 7.30am, staying two and a half hours. The weather deteriorated very fast and they failed to find their tent or equipment, so three snow-hole bivouacs were made without gear or food on the descent. Heinrich had a haemorrhage and Stallbohm frostbite. Eventually a party from Base helped them down the last stage, and Base Camp was reached after two weeks on the mountain. This was the third ascent of Batura 1 (previous ascents: German 1976; Austrian 1983). The first attempt was led by Mattias Rebitsch in 1951, and, despite ascents of many of the higher peaks, several of them and many smaller peaks remain unclimbed. Since this expedition Jerzy Wala of Krakow has produced a useful sketch map of this complex area, and there is also a very fine but rare Chinese map.



There were a good number of parties operating on peaks below 6000m. Many of the dozens of parties walking in the open zones tried some climbs and 300 people in 49 parties were given permission to trek in restricted areas. Among these were British climbers who tried Shani (5885m) by its unclimbed SE face, in June and early July (A Macnae, P Bale, R Spillett and S Thompson); their group ascended South Twin (5640m) by its N face, a 7900m ice route, and the NW face of Mehrbani (5639m), also reported as TD inf. Elsewhere, Phil Bartlett and Lindsay Griffin tried Jur Jur Khona Sar (c6000m) near the KKH, but the excessive June temperatures made it too dangerous. Returning in late November, Mike Woolridge, Peter Cox and Griffin climbed the 2000m S face of Tapadan Sar (6100m). They set up Base at the snow-line of 3500m, in a shepherd's hut. There was winter snowfall – early, it is claimed, for the area. Daytime temperatures barely reached zero, but there was sun and night-time temperatures were no worse than alpine winter (-24°C). The party did the face in five days, with a summit day of 21 hours in crisp, clear and relatively calm conditions. Snow conditions were '... not unexpectedly abysmal, with much dry and unconsolidated powder'. This peak near Karun Koh was climbed by Andy Cave and John Stevenson in 1987. Another winter venture: Japanese intending to climb on Gasherbrum 2 were forced to abandon the idea at Urdukas around the same time.

The trekking parties who do climb have entered a new golden age of possibilities among the smaller peaks. In valleys like the Hushe there was a particularly extensive amount of activity. Most do little to record their activities, but modern technical abilities and equipment, and the relative ease of access to some areas, have broached a development which can provide new climbing for at least a generation. This makes the concentration upon *voies ordinaires* on the big peaks – hard unimaginative work as it is – look ever more myopic.

In the East Karakoram the ascent of Rimo 1 (7385m) by an Indo-Japanese expedition was the most significant event. Led by Hukam Singh, the expedition went from the Siachen glacier to Terong Topko. Floods ensured that

four days were spent entering the valley, and a 'rope suspension traverse bridge' was used. After a traverse of the N Terong glacier and two camps, Climbing Camp 1 was made at the base of the Ibex Col (5960m). A couloir was then followed above and beyond the col, to a hanging glacier below the summit. Camp 2 was placed at 6800m on 19 July, and Camp 3 at 7000m on 27 July. There was then much bad weather, but on 28 August six members reached the top: Sumania of the India-Tibet Border Police, N D Sherpa of the Indian army, Yoshida and Ogata of Japan were on top at 2pm, and at 3.30 Kanhayalal and Ratan Singh also reached the summit.

A V Saunders adds:

Rimo 1, the Painted Mountain, was first attempted by Harish Kapadia's Indo-British Expedition of 1985, which climbed the W ridge in alpine style to a point near the Indo-Japanese Camp 3. During the same expedition Wilkinson and Fotheringham climbed Rimo 3 (7233m) in a single exploratory push from Base Camp on the Terong glacier. In 1986 Peter Hillary's Indo-New Zealand expedition made an attempt to climb the E ridge but suffered from delays.

It has been reported that Hukam Singh's expedition used some two kilometres of fixed rope between Camps 1 and 3, and a further five 'lengths' above Camp 3. I find this very disappointing. It must by now be obvious that a mountain of this size and difficulty should not be laced with fixed rope. Not only is this unnecessary, but it also contributes to mountain pollution. In addition, fixing ropes needs fixed camps and large, heavyweight expeditions with large numbers of porters. The resulting strain on the arid and fragile ecology of the Karakoram valleys can be irreversible. When we visited the beautiful and isolated Terong valley in 1985, there were several species of wildlife, hoof and paw prints covered the sands and copses of hardy conifers dotted the cliffs. Heavy expeditions would certainly destroy the beauty of the place, stripping the wood and ruining the habitats. A single evening meal for porters can mean the elimination of scores of the small (but sometimes centuries-old) trees.

This is not my view alone. The Mountain Wilderness conference at Biella, 1988, proposed that mountaineers could do their bit for the ecology by 'encouraging alpine-style mountaineering in the Himalaya and other remote ranges (light or ultra-light expeditions); recommending that host governments adopt and enforce measures to eliminate the negative behaviour and negative impacts of expeditions and trekking parties.' So it is particularly sad to see Hukam Singh's expedition being claimed as an important achievement. Let us hope its importance is as an end marker for this type of expedition.

Harish Kapadia adds:

Elsewhere in the Karakoram the second ascent of Mamostong Kangri was achieved by an Indian Army team led by Major A M Sethi. They crossed the Saser La and approached via the Thangman glacier from the east. The route of first ascent was then followed.

Apsarasas I (7245m) was climbed by the Indian Army in July, with six

summiteers. A little to the south, Saser Kangri I and IV received an ascent by a Delhi team. This team came in from the Nubra valley to the Phuckpoche glacier. They set up three camps to follow the W ridge, first climbed in 1987 by the Indo-British army team. After several attempts foiled by bad weather, the summit of Saser Kangri I (7672m) was reached on 24 August by four climbers, including the leader Heera Lohia. On the same day Saser Kangri IV (7416m) was climbed by three others. There were injuries and, later, amputations.

This was an excellent achievement, more so for being the first civilian attempt on the peak.