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The Story of an Ice Axe

and how its discovery broke through 40 years of silence
concerning the British Minapin/Diran Expedition, 1958

(Plates 41–44)

The Beginning

The Karakoram in Northern Pakistan is one of the most isolated and impenetrable mountain ranges in the world. Diran (7257m), which was earlier called Minapin Peak, is in the western part of the range. Its snow dome reminds us of the ample breast of a noblewoman, in sharp contrast to the masculine Rakaposhi (7788m). The two mountains are connected by a ridge at over 5000m. Diran is frequently called 'the beauty of the Karakoram', although she is not so gentle to climbers. Thirteen climbers have lost their lives on Diran, two of them in 1999.

It was a windy but fine day on 7 July 1958. Two British climbers were ascending the final summit slope above the broad west ridge of Diran at an altitude of 7000m, and it appeared that they would soon be on the top. By 11am, the summit and the two climbers, Ted Warr, the party leader, and Chris Hoyte, the medical officer, were covered with thick cloud. The next day was fine and calm. Dennis Kemp and Walter Sharpley were climbing from Camp 3 (5850) to Camp 4 (6550m) in support. They could find no evidence, however, that the two climbers had returned safely to their top camp. Kemp and Sharpley climbed higher, following the footprints of the summit team, but they could see no trace of them on the summit slope above. They searched again without success for another day, but by that time physical exhaustion and dangerous snow conditions forced them to abandon the search. With heavy hearts they began their descent to Minapin village and the long journey home to inform the dead men's family and friends of their loss. Meanwhile, Trevor Braham, the fifth member of the team and the only experienced Himalayan climber, had returned to India two weeks previously because his leave had expired. In the UK no memorial service was held for the two lost climbers. The family grieved privately, the Hoyte family having already lost two other sons. The remaining members of the expedition kept in touch for a while, but contact gradually disappeared.

Thirty-eight years later, in July 1996, two young Japanese climbers, Hiroshi Iwazaki and Masanori Suzuki, planned to climb Diran from the

south via Bagrot village. While they were establishing Advanced Base Camp at 4500m, a large avalanche demolished their tent. Fortunately, they themselves had a narrow escape, but all their climbing equipment was buried under the snow. If the avalanche had struck five minutes later, they would have been caught inside the tent and would probably have lost their lives. After this unfortunate start, they returned to base camp for several days to restore their energy for another attempt.

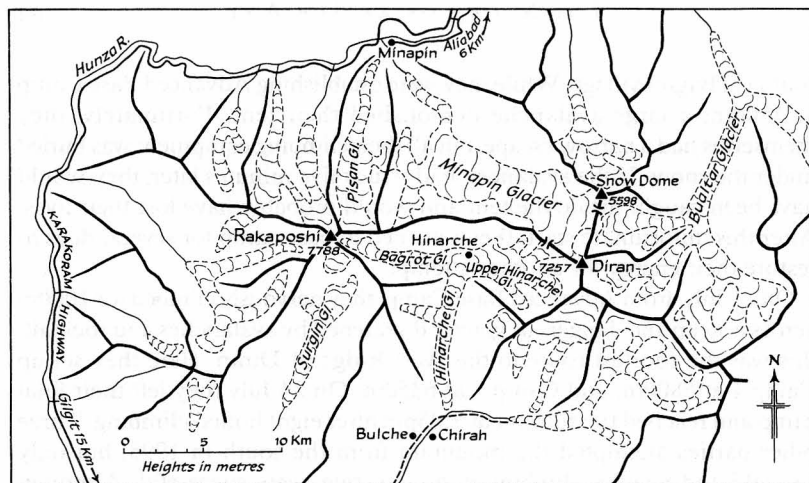
On 21 July, from Advanced Base Camp, they nervously climbed for 1000m across a steep and dangerous glacier threatened by avalanches and rockfall; this was the shortest route to the West Ridge of Diran. Here they set up Camp 1 at 5800m, and Camp 2 at 6350m. On 24 July they left their final camp and reached the summit at 2.05pm after eight hours' climbing. Three other parties attempted the mountain from the south in 1996, but only Iwazaki and Suzuki, climbing in alpine style, were successful. Although many clouds were floating around the summit plateau, weather conditions were still clear enough for them to see a number of 7000m and 8000m peaks in a full circle around their viewpoint.

Since they did not have a rope, Iwazaki and Suzuki descended the steep 45° summit slope separately. It was 3pm. At an altitude of about 6800m-7000m, Suzuki saw what looked like a white wooden stick lying on the slope. This seemed strange, because there were of course no trees on the snow ridge, and Suzuki decided to take a closer look. After he had removed the stick's icy snow covering, he was surprised to find an old ice axe in perfect condition. The axe was lying in a slight hollow, the head downwards and the spike sticking upwards, but no name was written on it. The rescued ice axe was taken back to Japan and kept at Suzuki's house. After applying linseed oil to protect the wooden shaft, Suzuki did nothing more about it for one and a half years.

On 25 January 1998, the 30th Anniversary of the Himalayan Association of Japan was celebrated in Tokyo. At the reception party I was first told by Suzuki and Iwazaki about the discovery of the ice axe, and was asked to look for the owner of the axe in order to return it. I was selected for this task for three reasons: first, because they themselves were busy climbing more Himalayan mountains; second, because I was acquainted with a member of the Austrian party which had made the first confirmed successful ascent of Diran in 1968 and had read their report in a Japanese mountaineering journal; and, third, I had actually visited the Bagrot Valley, as a trekker, one week earlier than Iwazaki's party in 1996. Indeed, I knew Diran well, since I had seen it from the north over the Bualtar Glacier, from the west from Ultar base camp and from the south from the Bagrot Valley over the Hinarche Glacier.

Characteristics of the ice axe

It was obvious to Iwazaki and Suzuki that the axe was very old. The length of the wooden shaft was 90cm, and that of the metal head, including the



The Diran Region

blade and pick, was 30cm. There was an iron ring on the shaft, and a wrist loop made of cotton. Since few scratches were visible either on the pick or the ferrule, Iwasaki and Suzuki thought that it must have been brand new when it was used.

The ice axe appeared to have been made before 1970, because at the end of 1969 a dramatic change occurred in the shape and materials used to make ice axes. Shafts became shorter than 70cm, and the materials used for shafts also changed from the traditional wood. The whole in the headset commonly found now was also introduced and the cotton wrist loop replaced by one made from nylon.

A search of mountain literature for the possible owner

My search started with an investigation of the mountaineering history of Diran. The mountain is not far from the nearest village, and its short approach to base camp has encouraged a number of climbing parties. Not counting reconnoitring parties, I found that, before 1998, a total of 37 expeditions had attempted Diran, of which only 13 were successful. Many of the failed parties had abandoned the climb below 6500m – far below the place where the ice axe was found. Furthermore, I discovered that between 1968 and 1979, no foreign party had attempted the peak, probably for political reasons. Only a Pakistan army party was given permission to climb in 1970, but their climb was abandoned at 6500m.

Since the ice axe was believed to have been made and used before 1970, I was able to confine my search to only five expeditions: the British in 1958, the Germans in 1959, the Austrians in 1964, the Japanese in 1965 and another expedition from Austria in 1968. The 1964 Austrian party

was omitted, since the maximum height they reached was 5500m. Regarding the Austrian expedition of 1968, the first successful group to climb Diran, Dr Rudolf Pischinger told me that no ice axe was left on Diran. The leader of the 1965 Japanese party, Dr. Ryuichi Kotani, also replied to my inquiry that no ice axes had been left behind. My search for the 1959 German party was the most difficult. Dr Walter Welsch of the German Alpine Museum in Munich kindly gave me the address of the party leader, Dr H J Schneider. Yet, in spite of repeated letters of request, I received no response. Another approach, therefore, was attempted from the Austrian side, because one of the climbers of Diran in 1959 was an Austrian, Mr. Rudolf Bardolej. My first approach, to the Austrian Alpine Club in Innsbruck, failed to get an answer. Then I asked for help from two Austrian friends, Mr H Probst living in Kuchl and Dr N Gassner in Klagenfurt. Thanks to their efforts, it was found that Mr Bardolej had died in Salzburg at the age of 86 in 1998. They told me that his wife knew nothing about his ice axe, but his mountaineering friend, Mrs Hermann Schimke, might know something about it. So I immediately tried to contact her, but again received no response. Thus, my search came to a temporary halt.

At the end of the summer, I received a letter from Dr Schneider, leader of the German expedition of 1959. This was completely unexpected, since I had given up hope of hearing from him. He stated that his party left no ice axe on Diran. So, by a process of elimination, there remained finally only the two members of the 1958 British Expedition as the most probable candidates for ownership of the ice axe.

A difficult search for the British party members

I used two ways to investigate the mountaineering activities of the British party, one through the high-altitude porters from Minapin Village, and the other through the surviving party members. In July 1999, I asked Suzuki to visit Minapin village and try to find the high-altitude porters employed by the British party. Suzuki met with Ali-Mohamad (80-85 years old), but the activities of many foreign expeditions were mixed together in his memory so no useful information was obtained. Of the other three porters, Mehrban had died in 1991, Shuja was still living in Minapin though not available; no news was obtained of Ghulam.

My search for surviving members of the expedition was not easy, because I did not know personally any active climbers in the UK. I began by screening the home pages of the Internet, where all I could find was the Manchester Mountaineering Club. My e-mail message produced no response. Then, by a happy chance, some British medical doctors visited Japan to take part in the 3rd World Congress on Mountain Medicine and High Altitude Physiology held in Matsumoto City, 20-24 May 1998. Dr J S Milledge and Dr A J Pollard promised to deliver my letter to the Alpine Club in London. Several weeks later, a fax arrived from

Sheila Harrison at the Alpine Club, giving the address of Trevor Braham, the only surviving member of the 1958 British party. Immediately, I wrote to him in Switzerland, but on 8 July I received a disappointing reply:

The idea to return the ice axe to the bereaved family of Ted Warr or Chris Hoyte may be difficult to realize. Although Warr was married, I have quite lost touch with his wife, and I do not know whether she is still alive. Hoyte was not married, and it is most unlikely that his parents would still be living today. Dennis Kemp died 4 years ago, and for over 20 years I have been out of touch with Walter Sharpley.

This was a great shock for me, as it seemed that a silence of 40 years stood between me and my goal, like a thick wall blocking any further advance to my search.

Ann Anderson's search

A few months later, quite unexpectedly, a letter arrived from London from Ann Anderson on 25 September 1998. She introduced herself as a daughter of the late Ted Warr. She wrote that her father had died when she was 13 years old. Ted had helped to establish the London Mountaineering Club in co-operation with his close friend Frank Bacon, and a special memorial extension for Ted was annexed to the LMC mountain hut at Nant Peris from a donation by Ted's wife Phyllis in 1964. After her mother died in 1995, Ann tried to fill up the emptiness she felt from the loss of her parents by writing about their lives. When she came to write about the Minapin/Diran expedition, though she had Dennis Kemp's account, she wanted to find out more about the relationship between the climbers and whether it was correct, as her mother had told her, that it was Ted's impatience that led to his own and Chris Hoyte's death. Reading through the letters of condolence, including one from Trevor Braham, she felt a terrible grief at her mother's loneliness after 1958 and how the family had suppressed their feelings for so long. Her search started in the summer of 1996, coincidentally at about the same time as the discovery of the ice axe on Diran. Since almost 40 years had elapsed it was not easy to find out about the other members of the expedition. Her search began with the LMC and through them she rediscovered two old family friends, Frank Bacon and John Jackson, whom she had not seen since childhood. She also met Terry Tullis, warden of Harrison Rocks, who was a major link in her research, helping her to meet with the Kemp and Sharpley families. Through her mother's cousin, Grace Ruoff, she met the Hoyte family.

In 1990 Dennis Kemp, aged 64, had fallen to his death when a rope broke while he was rock climbing in Australia. Walter Sharpley never went to the Himalaya again after 1958, though he kept up his mountain walking and helped to set up the first electronic computer in Scotland. After retirement, he died of a stroke in 1994 at the age of 74. His wife Esther visited

the Karakoram the following year to see the mountain which her husband had attempted 37 years earlier. Ann finally contacted Trevor Braham, the only surviving member of the expedition, again through the Alpine Club. By coincidence, this happened only two weeks after Braham had written to me that he had lost contact with the expedition families. But having received my letter about the ice axe, he was able to tell Ann of its amazing discovery. Trevor Braham was therefore a key person in putting me in touch with Ann. She wrote to me in great excitement about the ice axe.

On 24 October 1998 Ann sent me several colour photos of the 1958 expedition. They included a group photo of four members and the Pakistani liaison officer with their ice axes at Camp 1, adding reality to my search of the literature. Important information on the identification of the ice axe was supplied by John Jackson, who had been responsible for the preparation of the mountaineering equipment used on the expedition. Jackson and Warr had opened a shop for camping and mountaineering equipment in London in the early 1950s. He told me that seven new ice axes from Stubai Fulmes of Austria were donated for the expedition. Three remained in the shop and four were brought out to the Karakoram. Jackson could recall the characteristics of the Stubai ice axes, including their flat head, minor rifle on the pick side, wooden shaft, cotton wrist band and the trade mark 'Stubai' somewhere on the metal part. His detailed memory of so long ago was surprising, and provided the most important information towards the positive identification of the ice axe. Quite recently, Ann found another mark, a triangle with a figure 7, scratched into the metal head of the axe. This may support the theory that the axe was indeed one of the seven ice axes donated by the Austrian sponsor.

Delayed identification in Japan

This important information about the ice axe arrived from the UK at irregular intervals, and its confirmation in Japan progressed only very slowly. Both Iwazaki and Suzuki had gone to the Himalaya. Iwazaki was successful on Saipal (7031m) in West Nepal, and returned to Tokyo at the end of November 1998. But soon he left again for Mt Fuji and stayed there for a month. On 22 December I managed to catch him after a year-end party of the Himalayan Association of Japan, and obtained detailed information from him about how the ice axe was discovered. The axe was found on the Bagrot side of the mountain, not the Minapin side, and the slope was so steep that no one, he said, could have descended it safely without an axe. He added that dropping an ice axe on that slope would have been a suicidal mistake, suggesting that the owner of the axe must surely have fallen at the scene. Meanwhile, Suzuki had reached the top of Mustagh Ata (7546 m), and had then attempted the 8000m giant Manaslu (8165m). Soon afterwards he returned to Nepal to work as a guide for a TV company.

Ann, meanwhile, was asking me to contact Suzuki as soon as possible about details of the ice axe. The most important fact I eventually obtained

from him by telephone on 18 February 1999 was that the mark, 'STUBAI' appeared on the head part of the axe, and that other characteristics were similar to those described by John Jackson. Suzuki added that the ice axes shown in pictures of the 1958 expedition were very similar in shape to the axe he had found. On 18 March 1999 Suzuki brought the ice axe to Tokyo and I saw it for the first time. When held in the hand, its heavy weight showed its sturdy nature, while its coarsely-grained, white shaft bore witness to many years of weathering. Especially noteworthy was the fact that part of the wrist band was broken, indicating that a very strong force had torn the ice axe from the wrist of its owner.

One final question remained: who was the owner of the Stubai ice axe, Ted Warr or Chris Hoyte? The answer to that question was given by Dr Bill Edgar, a friend of Chris and a potential member of the 1958 expedition. He testified that Chris owned an ice axe made by Simond of Chamonix, and that he most probably took that axe on the expedition. Bill owns the same type of Simond ice axe, and a direct comparison of the two, Simond and Stubai, was made in London. The two ice axes were different, and this conclusion indicated that the owner of the Stubai ice axe was almost certainly Ted Warr. John Jackson said later that, as a director of Jackson & Warr, Ted was expected to test one of the donated ice axes instead of his own which was not, in any case, in very good condition. Thus, our search for one and a half years was complete and had led to the owner of the ice axe.

A sequel

There is a sequel to the British Minapin/Diran Expedition of 1958. According to Mehrban, a local guide living in Minapin and attached to the British Expedition as a high-altitude porter in 1958, a charming lady visited Minapin in about 1960. She said she was a sister of Ted Warr and hired 22 porters and Mehrban as a guide; she climbed Diran up to 5500m and only gave up when the slope became too steep. Her name was Arnett Warr, 22-23 years old at that time. It is true that Ted Warr had two sisters, but neither of them had ever left the UK throughout their lives. Warr is an unusual family name. When consulting the World Warr Family Dictionary, Ann found that a lady with the name Arnett Warr was living in Florida, USA, but she was unknown at the address given. Therefore, whether or not Arnett Warr was a distant relative of Ted Warr and visited Diran is not certain. Alternatively, this might be a made-up story created by Mehrban, but confirmation could not be made, since Mehrban had since died.

Epilogue

The final task was to decide how the ice axe should be handed over to the bereaved family of Ted Warr. Ann proposed the idea of holding a hand-over ceremony at the Alpine Club in London which had given us so much help in our research. This would be a memorial ceremony for Ted Warr and Chris Hoyte, and as many as possible of the relatives and friends of the

British Minapin/Diran Expedition of 1958 would be invited. Sunday, 29 August 1999 was a fine and warm day in London in spite of the end of summer. At noon, Ann declared the opening of the ceremony, followed by an introductory speech by John Jackson, who was co-director of Jackson & Warr Ltd, and the equipment manager of the 1958 expedition. Then Trevor Braham, the only surviving member of the expedition and the author of *Himalayan Odyssey*, spoke about the Minapin/Diran expedition using old but still fine colour slides. This was followed by short greetings from family and friends of the expedition members, including Esther Sharpley (widow of Walter), Bill Edgar, a friend of Chris, Susanna Craddock, a sister of Chris Hoyte, and Mike Warr, son of Ted. The last lecture was presented by myself on the ascent of Diran from the southern side, with a description of the discovery of the ice-axe and the search process for the possible owner. The climax of the ceremony was the hand-over of the ice axe from myself, Shigeharu Inouye, to Ann Anderson, daughter of Ted Warr.

There was an unexpected question from one of the guests as to why Suzuki had been so keen to return the ice axe to the original owner. I replied that he probably wanted to do so as an act of friendship to the family who had lost a most important family member, because an article left by the deceased would be highly esteemed by a family in the Orient.

Fifty-one people attended the ceremony in total. These included the son and daughter of Ted Warr, their children and grandchild, cousins and friends (18 people), two sisters of Chris Hoyte, their husbands, children and grandchild and members of the 'March 18 Club' set up when Chris was a medical student (24 people). One more sister of Chris living in Zambia sent a message. Others attending were the guest speaker and former editor of the *Himalayan Journal*, Trevor Braham and his wife; Esther Sharpley, widow of Walter; Ian Kemp, nephew of Dennis Kemp. Mountaineering friends of the members included Frank Bacon, a co-founder of the London Mountaineering Club; Michael Westmacott, ex-President of the Alpine Club; John Jackson and his wife; Terry Tullis, husband of the mountaineer Julie Tullis, and a close friend of Dennis Kemp; Johanna Merz, former editor of the *Alpine Journal*. We heard, with great regret, that Stewart Fisher, a cousin of Chris and a mountaineer, had lost his son on Les Droites this year. Final participants were Shigeharu Inouye and his wife. Guests had come from Wales, Scotland, Canada, Switzerland, Australia, Jamaica and Japan, as well as London. The entire ceremony was recorded on video tape by Peter Anderson, grandson of Ted Warr. In addition, recordings were made of personal interviews with some of the guests, who expressed their thoughts and feelings about the event. These were very interesting and impressive.

Although all except one of the members of the 1958 British Diran Expedition have since died, and their family members have led different and varied lives without any communication with each other for 40 years, they grasped this opportunity to come together at the Alpine Club through

the discovery of an old ice axe on Diran. It was a deeply impressive scene to see them talking of their late father, husband, brother, uncle and friends, easily transcending this 40-year barrier of silence. It was also felt that the ice axe had been found just in time, because if this had happened several years later, many of the people directly connected with the 1958 Expedition would have been too old to attend the ceremony. The bereaved family members told me that the ceremony and receiving of the ice axe had helped to reduce their mental anguish over the disappearance of Chris Hoyte and Ted Warr on Minapin/Diran on 7 July 1958.

HISTORICAL NOTE

Trevor Braham, the fifth member of the British Minapin Expedition 1958, writes:

The five-man expedition, organised by Ted Warr, was the first to make an attempt to climb the mountain. The Minapin glacier, which had been visited by members of Eric Shipton's survey party in 1939, was visited again 15 years later by a party of German and Austrian scientists and climbers (including Anderl Heckmair) who explored a number of glaciers in the Hunza and Nagar regions. They observed Minapin peak at close range and recommended the west ridge as a feasible ascent route. In 1958 Mike Banks and Tom Patey climbed Rakaposhi, of which Diran (Minapin) is an outlier.

Members of Ted Warr's party climbed Sumayar peak (Snow Dome) 5598m on 22 June 1958. From its summit a route was traced up the N face of Minapin relatively safe from avalanches. With a base below the face, a second camp was set up in an ice cave at 5180m on the N face. Two further camps were placed, at 5850m and 6550m on the W ridge. From the last camp Ted Warr and Chris Hoyte set out for the top on 7 July. On the same day Dennis Kemp and Walter Sharpley, in support, ascended to the top camp with supplies of food and fuel. From there they observed Warr and Hoyte ascending high up on the steepening slopes leading to the summit. It was a very windy morning at the top camp, and at 11am clouds obscured the summit, which was not visible again until the evening. There were no further signs of the two climbers and no traces of them were found, although on 8 July and again on the 9th in calm and sunny weather Kemp and Sharpley climbed up to the top camp and beyond, following Warr and Hoyte's upward tracks towards the upper slopes.

When Ted Warr and Chris Hoyte were last seen they were at about 7000m, and would have been an hour and a half away from the summit, which is situated at the far end of a broad plateau, the latter

falling steeply down to the Bagrot glacier on the south side. It is likely that they succeeded in gaining the summit plateau, and it is just possible that they were able to reach the top of Diran – thus becoming the first to do so – before they were struck by a storm which appears to have continued for several hours. Disoriented in a whiteout on the summit plateau, they apparently strayed across to the south side, where the ice axe was found 38 years later, embedded in the ice on a 45° slope. Whether the accident occurred on the ascent or the descent can only be a matter for conjecture.

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41. Western view of Diran from Ulta Base Camp, with the W Ridge forming the right-hand skyline and the N Ridge splitting light and shade in the evening sun. The ice axe was found by Masanori Suzuki and Hiroshi Iwazaki just below the fore-summit on the W Ridge. (*Dennis Kemp*) (p190)



42. Chris Hoyte and Walter Sharpley climbing the W Ridge of Diran. (*Dennis Kemp*) (p190)



43. The 1958 Diran team with the Mir of Nagar. *Left to right* Walter Sharpley (in green smock), Chris Hoyte, Dennis Kemp, the Mir of Nagar, Ted Warr and a Pakistani porter. (Dennis Kemp) (p190)



44. The British Camp 1 on Diran, with the lost ice axe. (Dennis Kemp) (p190)