
LINDSAY GRIFFIN

Pakistan 2003

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Introduction

With the political situation now more stable, an increased number of teams visited Pakistan during 2003, though there was notably little in the way of American or British representation. Approximately 54 expeditions took up permits for peaks over 6500m. Of these 85% went to the Baltoro and 75% attempted 8000m peaks. As this year coincided with the Golden Jubilee of the first ascent of K2, it was expected that the number of climbers and trekkers would substantially increase over 2002 and 2003 levels, particularly as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were no longer advising against non-essential travel to Pakistan. However, it still warned of a serious terrorism threat in the North West Frontier area. The downside was that for the Baltoro there were increased pollution problems, damage to the delicate environment, problems with porters and of course increasing costs.

Pakistan is now the cheapest country in which to climb an 8000m peak but the future of climbing there is limited if the concentration continues to centre solely on the Baltoro and 8000m peaks. To this end it is reported that the Ministry is considering the latest UIAA proposal (backed by some of the major local tour operators) to remove royalty fees to mountains below 7000m in non-restricted areas.

K2 (8611m)

Krzysztof Wielicki's primarily Polish expedition in December 2002-February 2003 reached a maximum altitude of 7750m on the North Ridge, leaving K2 unclimbed in winter. Currently, only seven of the 14 8000m peaks have received winter ascents and most of these have come from Polish expeditions. Still unclimbed in winter are all the Karakoram peaks (K2, Broad Peak, Gasherbrums I and II, and Nanga Parbat), Xixabangma and Makalu.

In the summer seven expeditions visited K2, one from the north and six from the south. All failed due to bad weather and very difficult conditions on the mountain. The small multinational expedition on the North Ridge never got above 6600m, while the highest altitude attained from the south

was around 8300m. In mid-July several teams made summit attempts from a high camp on the Shoulder but were thwarted by very strong winds. It appears the sérac structure that forms the Bottleneck had partially collapsed earlier in the year, possibly due to the effects of an earth tremor, making passage through this section much more complex. The number of ascents of K2 remains at 198.

At lower levels, members of a Czech expedition discovered the remains of Renato Casarotto, the legendary Italian mountaineer who died in a fall into a crevasse at the bottom of the South Face in July 1986. His remains were re-buried close to the Gilkey Memorial.

Broad Peak (8047m)

A total of 26 climbers reached the 8047m main summit of Broad Peak on 15, 16, 17 and 18 July, and 8 August. All climbed via the *Normal Route*. Amongst these summitters were some notable 8000m peak collectors. The first group to the top on the 15th included Jean Christophe Lafaille (France), Simone Moro (Italy), Iñaki Otxoa de Olza (Spanish Basque) and Ed Viesturs (USA), all part of the Kazakhstan/International expedition. This was Viesturs' 13th main summit; he now only has Annapurna to do. In addition he has repeated Everest four times, Cho Oyu once and climbed Xixabangma Central. Broad Peak was Lafaille's 10th 8000m peak but his third within a space of one month and 25 days (he had previously climbed a new route on Nanga Parbat, reported elsewhere and before that Dhaulagiri).

After returning to Islamabad at the end of June, Lafaille reached Base Camp on 11 July. Both he and Viesturs felt fit enough to climb the peak in Alpine style (there was plenty of fixed rope in place) and with only two camps. On the 13th they climbed swiftly to Camp 2 at 6200m, where they spent the night. The following day they climbed through deep snow to Camp 3 at 7000m, then left again at midnight, reaching the 8047m summit a little before 11am.

In the latter stages of this ascent Lafaille had felt unusually tired and as the climbers began their descent, he found it increasingly difficult to breath properly. Below the col he was forced to sit down in the snow every three or four steps. At around 7400m Viesturs continued on down towards Camp 3, leaving Lafaille alone. Realising now that he was developing pulmonary oedema, he struggled to continue downwards. At a point where the track made a large zigzag in the slope, he decided to take a short cut. This nearly proved fatal. Not far from the track the snow opened up and he quickly found himself nearly 10m down in a crevasse. Two attempts to climb out via the steep side walls just ended in falls and left him very exhausted. He now started to get quite anxious, realising that due to the strong wind above, no one descending behind him would see tracks leading off the main piste. Finally, in a great effort he moved along the base of the crevasse and discovered an easier exit. He climbed out and struggled down to Camp 3.

Fortunately, not only was Viesturs present but also some of the Kazakh team, including the notoriously strong Denis Urubko. The decision was taken to move Lafaille down the mountain the same day. They left camp at 7pm with Viesturs carrying a huge rucksack of equipment and Urubko assisting Lafaille. Continuing through the night, by 6am they had reached Base, where Lafaille began a slow recovery. This is yet another interesting example of how even after three months at high altitudes, an excellent acclimatisation and on the third 8000m peak of the season, high-altitude mountain sickness can still strike those making a rapid ascent.

One of the Koreans who made the summit the same day, accompanied by two Nepalese Sherpas, Mingma Dorje and Dawa Wangchu, was Han Wang-Yong. With the summit of Broad Peak, Han became the 11th person and third Korean to complete all 14 8000m peaks. Fortunately for Urubko the weather held and he was able to come back up the mountain and summit on the 18th, his eighth 8000m peak. Also amongst the collectors and summiting the previous day, the 17th, was the Russian, Sergei Bogomolov, part of the Kazakh/International Expedition, who was making his 11th ascent of an 8000er. Now in his early 50s, Bogomolov's achievements include new routes on Kangchenjunga (1989), Dhaulagiri (1993), Cho Oyu (1991) and Ama Dablam (1994).

The last people of the season to summit Broad Peak achieved a rare hat trick. Italians, Romano Benet, his wife Nives Meroi, and Luca Vuerich, reached the summit on 8 August, having previously climbed both Gasherbrum I and II. Broad Peak has now received 255 ascents.

Gasherbrum II (8035m)

The ever-popular Gasherbrum II was attempted by 16 expeditions during the season, from which 72 individual ascents were made. These included Han Wang-Yong (his 13th 8000er) and the two Sherpas who summited Broad Peak (two other Nepalese on other expeditions also summited), seven Pakistanis, Anna Czerwinska (54) from Poland who now has five 8000m main summits (but also Broad Peak foresummit and Xixabangma Central), the Benet/Meroi/Vuerich trio completing the first peak in their hat trick on 19 July (the most popular summit day), Kazuyozhi Kondo, the 61-year-old Japanese who has now climbed six 8000m peaks plus Xixabangma Central all after the age of 50, and Basque climbers Juanito Oiarzabal (a repeat ascent for this man who has already climbed the 14 8000m peaks) and Edurne Pasaban. This was Pasaban's fifth 8000er and she went on to summit Gasherbrum I, as reported below. All climbed via the *Standard Route*. The original aim of the three Italians had been to link Gasherbrums I and II via GII's east ridge and a crossing of 7758m Junction Peak. However, the generally unstable weather and poor snow conditions proved unsuitable for an attempt on this ambitious project. Gasherbrum II, the most popular of the Karakoram 8000ers, has now received 652 ascents (a number beaten only by Everest and Cho Oyu).

Gasherbrum I (8068m)

Eleven expeditions had permits for Gasherbrum I, a number of which also planned to climb Gasherbrum II, which shares the same Base Camp. On 5, 23 and 26 July a total of 19 climbers were successful. All climbed via the *Normal Route* up the Japanese Couloir. These included the very experienced Ukraine mountaineer, Vladislav Terzeoul, who has now climbed 11 8000ers, the Benet/Meroi/Vuerich combo on the 26th just seven days after their ascent of Gasherbrum II, and the Spanish Basque Edurne Pasaban, who was completing her sixth 8000m peak. With her ability at altitude now well-proven, Pasaban is close to becoming the premier living female in the realm of 8000m-peak collectors. Only the American, Christine Boskoff, has the same number of ascents, as did Chantal Mauduit before she died. The record is still held by the famous Polish mountaineer, Wanda Rutkiewicz, who had achieved eight before her untimely death on Kangchenjunga in 1992.

Sadly there were four deaths on the mountain. On 17 July the experienced Ukrainian climber, Vladimir Pestrikov, sustained a bad injury at c6000m on the South Gasherbrum glacier, when he and several other members were caught in an avalanche. Although his team-mates were able to evacuate him to Camp 1 at 5600m, from where he was very quickly picked up by helicopter and flown to Skardu Hospital, he died later the same day. This Ukrainian team was planning to climb the South West Face Direct but changed to the Normal Route after the accident. The other two deaths occurred in the first summit party. A Pakistan porter on an unsuccessful Iranian expedition also died. The ascents reported above mean that Gasherbrum I has now been climbed 195 times.

Nanga Parbat (8126m)

Of the five expeditions to Nanga Parbat, only two were successful and a total of 14 climbers reached the summit, bringing the number of ascents of the mountain from 1953 to its Golden Jubilee year to 216. However, the Diamir Face of the peak proved the venue for the ascent by Jean Christophe Lafaille and Simone Moro's ascent of *Tom and Martina* (named after their children) in 80 days. This was the only new route on a very high mountain in Pakistan during 2003.

This success was doubly impressive, as in January the 37-year old Lafaille had sustained a broken collar bone and a blow to the head, which resulted in partial amnesia, after taking a 20m fall from an ice pitch in Vail, Colorado. He was stopped from hitting the ground by the only ice screw placed below.

On the other side of the mountain the Slovenian, Tomaz Humar, was hoping to make an audacious solo ascent of a new route on the huge Rupal Face. However, at around 6500m he gave up in the warm temperatures and deep unstable snow that had characterised conditions throughout his stay. As there was simply no chance that the face would improve, the team went home. Nanga Parbat has now received 216 ascents.

Hispar Glacier Region

Probably the first to penetrate the Karakoram Range in 2003 were three French and a Pakistani, who in a little over two weeks during April made a rare ski traverse of the classic Hispar-Biafo trek. Later, there were some impressive, though unfortunately unsuccessful, attempts at major lines on high peaks to the north of the glacier.

Khunyang Chhish East (c7400m)

A highly experienced three-man Polish team comprising Janusz Golab, Stanislaw Piecuch and Grzegorz Skorek made an unsuccessful attempt on the unclimbed summit of Khunyang Chhish East via the SW Face. Before last year it would appear that no attempt had ever been made on this difficult and inaccessible summit. However, before the Poles arrived, it is reported that a seven-member Korean expedition led by Kim Kyu-Tae had also made an unsuccessful attempt. Unfortunately, no details have been forthcoming.

The SW Face of Khunyang Chhish East is a major Karakoram problem on a par with the North Face of Jannu in Nepal and a solution remains to be found.

Khunyang Chhish (7852m)

As well as the two expeditions on the East Peak, the Main Summit of Khunyang Chhish was attempted by a seven-member Japanese expedition under Kazuo Tobita. The Japanese leader, who has developed a remarkable fascination for the peak, was making his fourth attempt to climb this very well-defended summit.

Khunyang Chhish, which is reported to mean Corner Peak in the local Burushkashi dialect, has been climbed only twice before, by a Polish team including Andrzej Zawada in August 1971 and by Mark Lowe and Keith Milne in July 1988.

Pumari Chhish South (7350m)

Two French climbers, Yannick Graziani and Christian Trommsdorff, were amongst the first to visit the range last year, making a couple of very spirited attempts to climb the south face of the virgin Pumari Chhish South. During the third week in May the pair reached 5400m on the elegant west ridge but were prevented from continuing further by windslab.

On their second attempt, following the line attempted twice previously, in 1999 and 2000, by Julie Ann Clyma and Roger Payne, they reached an altitude of 6900m, a point they estimated to be just two pitches below the ridge. Here, it began to snow. On the way down, at around 6500m, they witnessed the huge séracs, which threaten the lower section of the face, explode. The resulting avalanche wiped the approach clean, filling the valley below with an enormous cloud and even affecting Base Camp some 4km distant. The two descended with their hearts in their mouths and went home.

Peak 6920m

A four-man Russian team comprising Valeri Bagov, Ivan Dusharin, Viktor Kolesnichenko and Lev Yoffe, made the first ascent of the unnamed Pk 6920m, which lies on or close to the watershed ridge between Pumari Chhish and Yutmaru Sar. An application has been made to the Ministry of Tourism to call this peak *United Russia*.

Passu Peak (7295m)

Five members of a Japanese expedition reached the 7295m summit of Passu Peak (Passu Diar) on 18 August. Sadly, two days later during the descent one of the summiters, Toshio Takahashi, fell into a crevasse on the lower glacier at c5800m and died. Passu Diar, a long but gently angled climb from the Passu Glacier to the east, has now had a number of ascents since the first in 1978 by a joint Japanese-Pakistani expedition.

Malubiting Central (7260m)

On the 25 July two Spanish climbers, Raúl Magdaleno and Álvaro Novellón, made the second ascent of Malubiting Central. The Malubiting group is a complex of high and rarely visited summits on the watershed ridge west of Spantik. The five summits that make up the massif are hard to access. They were first seriously attempted by Tony Streater's military expedition in 1959. The central summit was first climbed by Hedeke Atsumi, Kazuhiko Moro, Masahide Onodera and Toshinori Takahashi on 2 August 1975. The NW summit (c7200m) appears to be still unclimbed.

Spantik (7027m)

Four expeditions attempted the *standard route* up the Pakistan Karakoram's most popular 7000m summit. At least two Japanese expeditions, each with four members, together with an 11-member German team, were successful in putting some of their group on the summit via the *standard route* up the SE ridge.

Latok V (6190m)

The Japanese climber Moromu Omiya returned for his third attempt on the unclimbed summit of Latok V. Omiya, who made the first ascent of Latok IV in 1980, attempted this small peak in both 1999 and 2000 via the south face. Last summer with two other companions he again tried the mountain but on the summit day was forced to give up just 70m below the top when it became too late to continue safely. The peak lies at the end of the SE ridge of Latok III.

Great Trango (6257m)

Four members of a Ukrainian expedition, Alexander Lavrinenko, Vladimir Mogila, Vitali Yarichveski and Alexey Zhilin, planned to try a new route up the huge NW face of Great Trango. In this they very nearly succeeded,

but the climbers were forced to abandon their attempt an estimated two-and-a-half pitches (approximately 100 vertical metres) below the summit when all their food and fuel had been used. The team had made nine portaledge camps and climbed 46 pitches before descending, rating the difficulties as VI 5.11 A4 and likening the climbing to that found in the Karavashin region of Kyrgyzstan, only on a much bigger scale.

Trango Tower (6251m)

In August, Toni Arbones from Spain, Denis Burdet and Nicolas Zambetti from Switzerland (the latter two were responsible for the first free ascent of *Divine Providence* on Mont Blanc in 2002) made an almost free ascent of the 1989 Albert/Güllich/Stiegler/Sykora route, *Eternal Flame* (1000m: 7b+ and A2) on the South Pillar of Trango Tower (6251m). At the time of the first ascent this route was almost certainly the hardest primarily-free rock climb achieved in the Karakoram.

Earlier, in July, the route had also received a very spirited attempt to free climb it by the French couple, Antoine and Sandrine de Choudens. Apart from the bolt ladder on pitch 10, Antoine had free climbed the route as far as pitch 20, after which he aided to the top. Tragically, Antoine de Choudens, a very accomplished climber who had climbed Everest without oxygen and had made many first ascents around the world, was killed in Tibet the following autumn.

Masherbrum (7821m)

The very strong American-Slovenian team of Steve House, Matic Jost and Marko Prezelj failed to make the first ascent of the magnificent north ridge of Masherbrum. Consistently poor weather and a dangerous snow pack meant that the three were never able to make a proper attempt on what is undoubtedly one of the most compelling unclimbed lines on a big Karakoram mountain. The team left Base Camp having got no higher than 5900m on their intended line.

Gasherbrum IV (7980m)

The well-known Australian-New Zealand partnership of Andrew Lindblade and Athol Whimp made two attempts on Gasherbrum IV. Their main aim was the second ascent of the celebrated *1985 Route* on the 2500m west face climbed by Voytek Kurtyka and Robert Schauer, a climb that many people acknowledge to be one of the greatest Alpine-style ascents ever made in the Greater Ranges. Lindblade and Whimp were plagued by the bad weather that affected everyone in the region. They were constantly battered by snow, wind and spindrift slides, and when they eventually ran out of food and gas, having reached a height of c6800m, there was no option but to go down. Another attempt, this time on the NW ridge, first ascended in June 1986 by Greg Child, Tom Hargis and Tim Macartney-Snape, was again thwarted by bad weather at around half-height.

Chogolisa (7665m)

A two-man Austrian expedition managed to gain permission for 7665m Chogolisa but was unsuccessful. Famous for the 1957 attempt, on which Hermann Buhl lost his life after an unroped fall through a cornice on the east ridge, the NE summit (7654m) was climbed the following year by a Japanese party via the same route. However, the slightly higher SW summit had to wait until 1975 for an ascent, when an Austrian expedition climbed the west ridge. The mountain has probably been climbed around half-a-dozen times to date but has been off-limits in more recent years due to its location close to the war zone.

West Karakoram Information

Wolfgang Heichel's *Chronik der Erschliessung des Karakorum Teil I - Western Karakorum*, published in Munich towards the end of 2003, is a 336 page, A4 paperback detailing the full history of expeditions to the Naltar-Batura regions of the West Karakoram. Heichel has tried to include a report on every expedition to have visited the mountains of this region, and has augmented this information with the addition of 17 maps from the famous Polish cartographer, Jerzy Wala, 142 black and white photographs, and 20 topo diagrams. Mountain groups include Koz Sar, Kampire Dior, Kuk Sar, Shani, Ultar, Passu and Batura, plus the mountains to the north of the latter. This is a very useful research tool but needs comprehension of the German language to get the most from it. For more information on how to purchase the book, look at www.alpenverein.de or contact the author at wheichel@t-online.de

Charakusa Valley**Haji Brakk (6000m)**

After his Masherbrum expedition reported above, House visited the Charakusa Valley with a local guide/cook, as required by the authorities for trekking in the Hushe region. On the 31 July he made the probable first ascent of a summit a little below 6000m in altitude, which he christened Haji Brakk (Haji is the title given to Muslims who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca). This rocky spire lies on the long and spiky ridge that runs north east from Namika, an elegant 6325m rock and ice pyramid first climbed in 1987 by a British party. Haji is the second summit north-east of Namika.

Throughout his stay in the region only one other western trekker was encountered and this in an area that has now received considerable attention from rock climbers, alpinists and trekkers. It still holds great potential, particularly as most peaks lie below 6500m and therefore do not require either a permit fee or a liaison officer.