



The British Hispar Sar Expedition

2004

Final Report

Introduction

The aim of our mountaineering expedition of just two climbing members –Andy Parkin and Simon Yates – was to attempt a steep couloir line on the South West face of Hispar Sar (6400m) and make the first ascent of the mountain. This stunning looking peak (photo 1), lies on the north side of the Hispar Glacier to the east of the junction with the Yutmaru Glacier (see map) in the heart of the Pakistani Karakoram.

Yates had made two previous trips to the region (1989 & 1996) and it was on the first visit that he saw Hispar Sar and marked it down as a future climbing objective. He had planned to attempt the mountain in 2003, but the Foreign Office still advised British nationals not to travel to Pakistan. In early 2004 the restriction was lifted and Simon asked Andy Parkin (the Chamonix resident British artist and climber) if he was interested in the trip. Having seen a couple of photos of the peak and a map of the area Andy accepted.

The events of September 11th 2001 and the ensuing ‘War on Terrorism’ caused a collapse in tourism in the northern areas of Pakistan. In the hope of bringing climbers back to the area the Pakistani government generously lifted the height at which a peak fee must be paid from 6000m to 6500m. This wonderful concession enabled the expedition to attempt the peak without fee, bureaucracy and the burden of a liaison officer. Having agreed by phone as to what technical climbing equipment, stoves etc were required, a simple plan was devised. Andy and Simon would meet at Manchester airport, travel to Pakistan, where the remaining supplies would be purchased and make their way into the mountains. By establishing a base camp somewhere near the junction of the Yutmaru and Hispar Glaciers they would be in an ideal position to make an attempt on Hispar Sar.

Summary of Events

11/9/04 Andy Parkin and Simon Yates fly out of Manchester.

12/9/04 Andy and Simon arrive in Rawalpindi, re-confirm flights to Gilgit and meet with their agents – Nasir Sabir Expeditions.

13/9/04 Fly to Gilgit in the Northern Areas and purchase most of the expedition supplies. A jeep was hired for the journey to Hispar the following day.

14/9/04 Jeep journey to Hispar village with a stop in Alaibad in Hunza to complete the shopping, collect some gas and pick up a cook – Nasir Ali. In the village twelve porters were hired and loads packed for the next day.

15/9/04 A long day walking from Hispar to Bitanmal.

16/9/04 Walk from Bitanmal to.

17/9/04 After a short walk we arrived at Jutmal, the site of the base camp, paid off the porters and began to set up camp.

18/9/04 A rest day in the camp.

19/9/04 Andy and Simon took a walk up the Yutmaru Glacier to acclimatise and look at the north side of Hispar Sar for possible descent routes.

20/9/04 Crossed the Yutmaru Glacier and carried loads up to the site of an advanced base camp at 4700m on a small glacier below Hispar Sar's S.W.Face, before returning to the base camp.

21/9/04 Rest day at the base camp.

22/9/04 A further enforced rest day due to bad weather.

23/9/04 Carried loads up to the site of the advanced base camp and camped for the night.

24/9/04 After walking up below the face to check conditions we returned to the base camp.

25/9/04 A rest day and celebration of Andy's 50th birthday.

26/9/04 We walked back up to the advanced base camp where we spent the night.

27/9/04 to 30/9/04 Climbing on S.W Face of Hispar Sar. After four long days of climbing the steep central couloir on the face and three awful bivouacs we reached the ridge approximately 300 metres below the summit.

1/10/04 After another bad night in a storm we took the decision to abseil the couloir, and in worsening conditions eventually reaching the tent at the advanced base camp.

2/10/04 Returned to base camp.

3/10/04 Packing at base camp. Six porters arrive for the walk down to Hispar.

4/10/04 Walked to Bitanmal.

5/10/04 Walked to Hispar village, where a jeep was waiting to take us to Gilgit.

6/10/04 A day free in Gilgit.

7/10/04 Return flight to Rawalpindi.

8/10/04 A day in Rawlapindi.

9/10/04 Flight to Manchester.

The Expedition

Having boarded a flight in Manchester Andy and Simon arrived in Rawalpindi, Pakistan in the early hours of Sunday 12th September. During the day they met with their agents Nasir Sabir Expeditions, who assisted in re-confirming flights to Gilgit for the following day and arranging porter insurance. A kitchen was then retrieved from storage in Islamabad and packed ready for the following day.

On Monday morning the weather was clear and Andy and Simon were able to catch a flight to Gilgit and avoid the dreaded journey by road up the Karakoram Highway. Once in the town a day of frantic shopping ensued, buying the bulk of the expeditions food and supplies. Abdul Quuam a longstanding friend of Simon's offered his jeep and services as driver for the journey to Hispar village the following day.

On Tuesday 14th we left Gilgit aboard Abdul's jeep and drove north through Hunza, stopping in Aliabad to pick up our cook - Nasir Ali, some Epi-gas cartridges and a few more supplies. Shortly afterwards we turned off the Karakoram Highway, crossed the Hunza River and climbed steeply to the town of Nagar. In the town we were informed that we could travel no further in Abdul's jeep and that we would have to hire the services of a local jeep to continue to Hispar. Naturally, the local jeep was expensive, but there was no alternative other than to pay up. We transferred all our kit, said our goodbyes to Abdul and continued to Hispar. Once in the village we set up camp for the night, started sorting loads and negotiated for some porters. We agreed

to pay for 5 stages at 330Rs per stage to reach Jutmal to the west of the junction of the Yutmaru Glacier with the Hispar Glacier.

Early on the 15th we set off with 12 Hispar porters, crossed the Hispar River and during the course of a very tiring day followed the ablation valley on the north side of the Hispar Glacier, before crossing the Kunyang Glacier to reach the sheperds huts at Bitanmal in a rain storm. At the huts we were jokingly introduced to Osama, who turned out not to be the world's most wanted terrorist, but a fourteen year old yak herder.

The following day was a little easier with a crossing of the Pumori Chhish Glacier before camping for the night. After an hour and a half walk we arrived at Jutmal on Friday 17th of September. As we went to pay off the porters they demanded an extra stage. We were adamant that we would pay no more than five and a half stages, but offered 2000Rs per man including a tip. A rather farcical argument developed, which got quite heated for a time until we all realised that 2000Rs was 20Rs more that the porters were demanding anyway. The crisis happily resolved the porters left and we began setting up base camp.

On Saturday the 18th September we completed sorting the camp and rested, feeling tired and a little run-down from days of continual travel and the rapid walk-in. A walk up the Yutmaru Glacier on the Sunday gave Andy and I views of the north side of Hispar Sar, which although less steep than our proposed route up, did not offer a straightforward descent from the peak.

Monday the 20th turned into a long day, as we carried kit across the Yutmaru Glacier and up below Hispar Sar's S.W. Face. Having found a suitable spot for an advanced base camp we stashed the kit and finally reached base camp at dusk.

By Tuesday a storm had set in, which confined us to the base camp. The following day was no better. We passed the time reading and listening in to cricket matches on the cooks short-wave radio.

By Thursday 23rd the weather had cleared and we returned to our advanced camp with further kit and food. The site of the camp proved to be terribly uncomfortable and we passed a cold, sleepless night in the tent lying on uneven ice. A walk up below the face on Friday confirmed that our proposed route was in good condition, after which we descended to the base camp.

Saturday the 25th was Andy's 50th birthday. We marked the occasion by drinking some whisky, although Andy had to be persuaded into drinking the amber liquid stored in a Nalgene water bottle – at first he was convinced it was my urine.

With time running out we returned to the advanced base camp on the Sunday and began climbing the steep central couloir line on Hispar Sar's S.W. Face early the next morning. The snow cone at the base of the couloir soon led into some steep icy runnels that gave superb climbing, before a more gently angled gully was reached. The gully continued for many pitches until with darkness approaching we moved right into a small snow basin hoping to excavate a bivouac ledge below a rock wall. At the junction of the snow and rock we managed to hack a bum wide shelf. In the gathering

gloom Andy fumbled with a karibiner clipped into a loop of rope and three stuff sacks slid off down the route. They contained most of our food the brewing kit and a spare can of gas. We settled down to a meal of instant noodles, washed down with warm water. This was to be our sustenance over the following days, supplemented with the few remaining chocolate bars.

The night passed uncomfortably on the inadequate bivouac ledge, as we were showered with sporadic spindrift avalanches. In the morning we started slowly and continued up the more reasonably angled central section of the couloir in fine weather. At the end of the day we managed a tiered sleeping arrangement by digging one sitting and one lie down platform into a soft area of snow in the middle of the couloir. We spent a much more comfortable night and were able to get going reasonably early the next day. This proved to be fortuitous, as while Simon was leading the first pitch it began snowing, bombarding Andy with regular avalanches as he belayed from the site of the bivouac.

The day gave some nice climbing, with a steep ice-fall leading into the uppermost basin in the couloir and a mixed pitch to exit it to gain a knife-edge ridge up and to the right. On the evening of Wednesday 29th September Andy and Simon settled down to a night in an incredibly airy bivouac hacked into the ridge. The night was quite windy with some snow.

Thursday 30th brought better weather and the hardest pitch on the climb. Andy followed the ridge above clearing rotten snow to climb runnels of steep ice to reach the south ridge proper. A further sensational pitch along waves of corniced ridge led to a flat spot below easy angled slopes leading to the summit. With the weather set fair a decision was taken to spend the rest of the day drying damp sleeping bags and to make a push for the top and back the following day, having stashed sleeping bags etc at the bivouac. We went to sleep happy, with the alarm set for midnight.

During the evening the wind got up, cloud moved in and we were soon enveloped by a storm. The weather was no better in the morning. With precious little food and virtually no gas remaining the decision to retreat was a formality. During Friday 1st of October we made numerous abseils back down the line of the couloir in the storm. At the base of the route we found the three food bags and staggered back down the glacier to the site of our advanced base camp. After many brews and plenty to eat we settled down to a cold damp night in the tent.

Saturday 2nd of October turned into a day best forgotten. After a leisurely breakfast we packed up and headed slowly down, our progress severely hindered by fresh snow lying over rocks and the continuing storm. While crossing the Yutmaru Glacier the visibility deteriorated and we became disorientated. Several hours were lost walking up the glacier and then down it. Disaster was only averted by a brief clearing in the mist, at which point we realised we were now walking down the Hispar Glacier and were past the point at which we needed to climb the moraine in order to gain the abalation valley where the base camp was located. We back-tracked and eventually reached the camp just as it was getting dark.

On the Sunday six porters arrived as agreed in the early afternoon with the blizzard still continuing. The weather cleared in the evening and was good the following day,

allowing us to pack up, clear the camp and walk back down to Bitanmal. By early afternoon on the 5th we were back in Hispar, where the porters were paid off and our gear loaded on to a waiting jeep. By 9-30pm we were back in Gilgit.

After a rest day in Gilgit we flew down to Rawalpindi on Thursday 7th of October, which allowed a further free day in Pindi before catching our flight home on the 9th.

We were both disappointed not to have reached the summit, with just straightforward snow slopes remaining above our top bivouac. It would have been wonderful to see the mountains to the north, but we thoroughly enjoyed four days of superb climbing. In keeping with modern style will certainly claim the first ascent of the S.W. face of Hispar Sar. The route is 1100m and alpine grade ED VI (see topo).

Both Parkin and Yates found this the most trouble free expedition they have either had to Pakistan. The logistics all worked perfectly and there was none of the bureaucratic hassle and extra cost of dealing with a permit and the Ministry of Tourism. By travelling to Pakistan in the autumn they also avoided the searing heat of the summer months and the poor snow conditions at lower altitudes that often accompany it. The people in the north of Pakistan were as friendly and hospitable as ever and at no time did we feel even remotely threatened. As climbers we should support them by returning to the Karakoram in numbers.

Budget

Expenditure		Income	
Flights	£1260	Mount Everest Foundation	£600
Food and meals	£230	The British Mountaineering Council	£1500
Porters and cook wages	£480	Personal contributions	£100
Jeeps	£100		
Accommodation	£80		
Porter Insurance	£20		
Gas	£30		
 TOTAL	 £2200		 £2200

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The British Mountaineering Council.

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Pakistan International Airlines and in particular Marion Lawrence at the Bristol Office.

Abdul Quuam at Xama Stores(excellent carpet shop), Airport Road, Gilgit.

Nasir Ali – cook.

The people of Hispar village.

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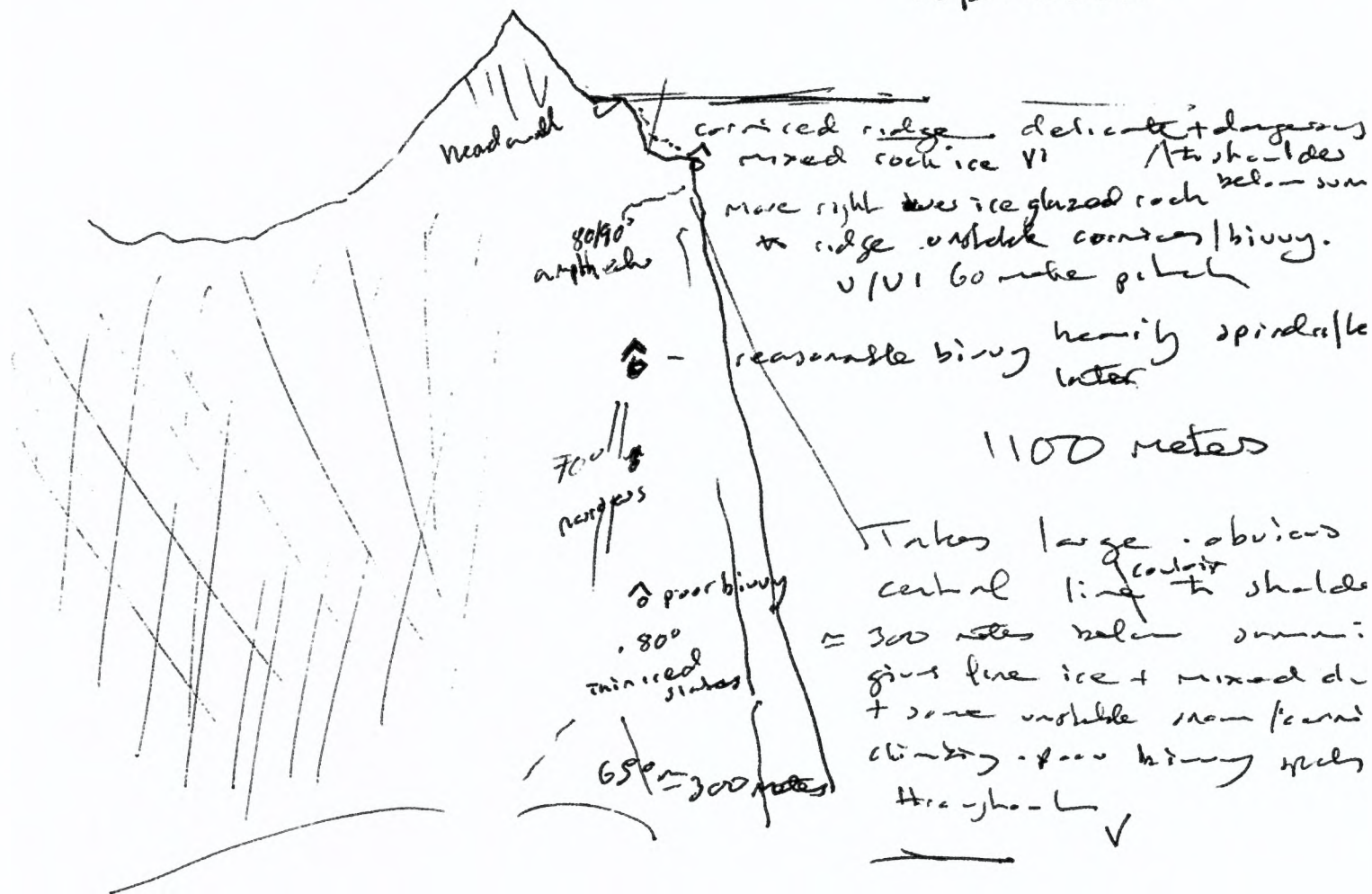
PHOTO 1



PHOTO 2

Hispar Sar
c 6400 meters

- The face S.W.
"Super couloir"



N Slope pass descent
hanging glac gets loaded.
SE Slope gets sun, steep + drop
all in lower section + into
the valley

1st day good climbing
conditions - high cloud
poor bivouy spindrift.
2nd day good + little
sun. rockfall.
3rd snowed in night. 1
in white all in
clearing snow spindrift
4th perfect day technical
ring to shoulder + drying
down in night. descent

