

Unclimbed Hispar 2006 Expedition – Final Report – MEF Reference 06/08

Summary

The objectives of the expedition were to attempt to make the first ascents of Hispar Sar (6395m) on the north side of the Hispar Glacier and of any of the three peaks (5783m, 6031m and 6041m) west of Gloster Peak in the Balchhish Range on the south side of the glacier. With time available, and no permits required on peaks below 6500m, we decided to extend the itinerary to include visits to the Shimshal and Chapursan Valleys and to attempt first ascents of unclimbed peaks in these areas, particularly the Shimshal Whitehorn (6304m).

Expedition members were Peter Thompson (leader), Lee Harrison, Ben Cheek and Greg Nunn. Cheek and Nunn only took part in Shimshal.

In Shimshal, we climbed Yazghil Sar (5964m) for acclimatisation. We made three attempts on Shimshal Whitehorn (or Adver Sar, the local name which is not generally used) and an attempt on the unclimbed Little Whitehorn (5800m). We made the first ascent of Mudhil Sar (5800m).

In Hispar we made the first ascent of Haigutum East (5783m) and an attempt on the unclimbed Khani Basa Sar (6441m).

In the Lupghar Valley, Chapursan, we made the first ascent of Gharhil Sar (5800m).

All summits were only reached by Harrison and Thompson. All climbs were done alpine-style. The climbing was almost entirely on snow and ice.

We were pleased to have made the first ascents of three minor peaks. However we were disappointed to have failed on the tougher Shimshal Whitehorn and Khani Basa Sar. Hispar Sar was not attempted for reasons given in the account. Overall, we covered a lot of ground and it was a challenging and rewarding expedition.

Account of events

18/6 Pete Thompson, Gregg Nunn and Ben Cheek flew to Islamabad. Pete flew by PIA from Manchester which has a useful 40kg baggage allowance.

19-20/6 Travelled by bus to Gilgit in the Northern Areas, 18 hours along the Karakoram Highway. We met Lee Harrison, who had travelled from China, in Gilgit.

21/6 Shopping in Gilgit for food, kerosene and other supplies. Got the bus to Karimabad in the Hunza Valley and bought epigas (second-hand from previous expeditions).

Shimshal

22/6 Travelled to Shimshal Village by bus and jeep. Packed loads and arranged porters with the help of Firmin, the owner of the Sifat Guesthouse where we stayed.

23/6 Set off with two porters, crossed the Yazghil Glacier and camped at a small shepherds settlement. Paid off porters.

24/6 Ben and Lee walked up 500m to collect water for the shepherd women who had been supplying us with water, but couldn't find the source! Made a carry up to base camp at 4600m and returned to settlement with water.

25/6 Moved up to base camp.

26/6 Descended into a valley to gain access to a couloir, which we climbed up to a high camp at 5150m.

27/6 Set off at 2.30am. Climbed along the North Ridge. Ben and Gregg stopped at 5800m and promptly fell asleep! Lee and Pete continued to summit (5964m), route alpine AD. Returned to high camp for a rest and got back to base camp by nightfall. Gregg was behind us and got lost in the dark. He was ready to bivvy a few hundred metres from camp when we returned and found him.

28/6 Returned to Shimshal and guesthouse carrying our own stuff, clumping along in mountain boots.

29/6 Rested in village. We were slightly put off by children saying: "Whitehorn expedition! Bad mountain!"

30/6 Packed porter loads for walk up to Shimshal Whitehorn. Arranged five porters.

1/7 Lee, Ben and Pete (Gregg has opted out of Whitehorn attempt and set off for a trek to Shimshal Pamir and an attempt on Mingling Sar). Walked up a valley directly above the village which led up to the North Face of Whitehorn. The approach was steep, with some difficult slopes, loose scree and rockfall danger. Paid off porters who hurried down and we set up base camp on the glacier at 4400m.

2/7 Climbed up through an icefall to view the route and the approach. Our intended route was up a couloir climbed by a French expedition the previous year to join the NW Ridge leading to the summit. The French described it as dangerous and it looked it, being susceptible to rock-fall and avalanches if there was a lot of snow. The attractive North Face is unfortunately threatened by big seracs. The weather had been good up to now, but there was heavy rain that afternoon. Ben sick (giardia?).

3/7 Went up through the icefall (2 hours) and found a safe bivvy site at 4700m, although at night it was alarming listening to the avalanches and watching the sparks from rock-falls.

4/7 Set off at 1.30am up the couloir. We took a wrong fork in the couloir to a dead end. It was snowing and we retreated. We left gear at bivvy site and returned to base camp.

5/7 Better weather and we returned to the bivvy site.

6/7 Climbed in good conditions up the deep snow slide channels. We were approaching the col at the top of the couloir at 5.30am when we got caught in a barrage of rock fall. We all got a battering and Ben was hit on the thigh by a large rock, leaving a deep hole. Lee expertly patched him up and applied a tourniquet. We retreated down the couloir, front-pointing, which was time consuming as Ben could only use one leg and worrying as it was starting to get warm. Reached the bivvy site and returned to base camp.

7/7 Lee and Ben went down to Shimshal for treatment while Pete remained at base camp. Members of Salewa's alpineXtreme team led by Matthias Robl walked past base camp on a reconnaissance. They went on to make the first ascent of Shimshal Whitehorn on 22/7/06.

8/7 Pete set off for a solo attempt on the North Ridge of Little Whitehorn (5800m), an unclimbed peak NE of Whitehorn. Climbing without a rope, the ridge was trickier than expected, and he retreated from 5400m, alpine D to high point.

9/7 Lee, Ben and Greg arrived at base camp with more food. Greg enjoyed eight trek to Shimshal Pamir but failed in Mingling Sar (5900m?).

10/7 Ben, Lee and Pete went up to bivvy.

11/7 Usual early start. Ben's leg was painful and he reluctantly turned back. He went on to make a good recovery. Lee and Pete climbed the couloir. A route-finding error near the top found us on steep ground which necessitated difficult roped climbing to get on line and we didn't reach the col at 5650m until 9 am. Moved up to a bivvy site at 5750m and went up to 5800m to reconnoitre the ridge. Slept through the heat of the day in our bivvy bags.

12/7 It was snowing when we got up 1am and we decided to retreat. As it turned out the weather was awful for the next few days. We climbed 100m or so easily above the col to make the first ascent of Mudhil Sar, as the locals referred to it, alpine D via the couloir. Descended to base camp and on down to reach Shimshal village by nightfall.

13/7 Lee, Ben and Gregg left for Karimabad. Pete sent one porter up to base camp to collect our remaining gear.

14/7 Pete returned to Karimabad by jeep with remaining gear and food. Due to the bad weather, travelling in a convoy we had to build a ford to cross a river and cleared six landslides by shovel. Such is travel in the Karakoram!

15-19/7 Rested in Karimabad or Gilgit, trying to put back on some weight. Ben and Gregg returned to the UK as previously arranged.

Hispar

20/7 Lee and Pete bought food in Karimabad.

21/7 Got jeep to Nagar and another to Hispar village. Road blocked at Huru, but porters were on hand. It was now late and we did not reach Hispar until 10pm.

22/7 Hired seven porters and an obligatory guide, Abid. Due to late start we spent the night at Falolinkish. Lee sick with stomach trouble.

23/7 Walked to Gusmanphari.

24/7 Walked to Jutmal.

25/7 Walked to our base camp at Haghura Shanga Liahung, a pleasant spot below Hispar Sar on the north side of the Hispar Glacier. Paid off porters who departed. The weather had been good since 20 July and we were keen to take advantage of it, so at 5pm we set off across the Hispar Glacier to attempt the first ascent of Haigutum East, one of our objectives. Not surprisingly, it was getting dark by the time we found a bivi site on the other side.

26/7 Usual alpine start. Traversed across North Face between big crevasses. Route finding error took us across avalanche debris which was swept by another avalanche an hour or so later. Made a mental note to avoid that route on the descent. Reached safe bivi site at 5200m and sheltered from sun in bivi bags during day.

27/7 Climbed the varied North Ridge (with some loose rock) to reach the summit of Haigutum East at 8am. (Our three objectives in the Balchhish Range on this side of the glacier were collectively referred to as the Haigutum peaks by the locals). Descended mountain abseiling off snow and ice bollards and walked back across glacier to reach base camp after dark. 17 hours on the move.

28/7 Rested at base camp.

29/7 The two remaining Balchhish objectives looked rather dangerous due to avalanches, seracs and cornices, so we decided to walk up the Yutmaru Glacier and have a look at the north side of Hispar Sar. We identified a fairly serious-looking line on the North Face of the mountain. Lee was still feeling ill and returned to base camp, while I continued up the glacier to have a look at Khani Basa Sar, another fine unclimbed peak. The South Ridge of the mountain looked promised.

30/7 Rested at base camp.

31/7 Rested at base camp.

1/8 Lee remained at base camp while I made a reconnaissance up the Khani Basa Glacier. The north side of Hispar Sar looked very difficult from this side.

2/8 Rested at base camp. All this moraine bashing was exhausting.

3/8 Decided to attempt Khani Basa Sar to start with and walked up the Yutmaru Glacier to a bivi site next to the East Yutmaru Glacier.

4/8 Continued up the glacier and climbed up to a col at 5600m at the start of the South Ridge of Khani Basa Sar. The ridge looked exposed and too difficult to climb without a rope, which we did not have. Pete's idea was to return with more gear, but Lee had been struggling due to his illness which had resisted all treatment, and it looked unlikely that he could do any more climbing. We returned to the bivi site.

5/8 Returned to base camp. Rain that night ended an unusually long spell of good weather.

6/8 At base camp. Rain.

7/8 At base camp. Rain. We arranged for porters to come up with a passing trekking group.

8/8 At base camp. Rain.

9/8 Lee left to arrange a jeep in Hispar.

10/8 Three porters arrived at base camp. Walked to Shimbarish.

11/8 Walked to Bitanmal.

12/8 Pete arrived in Hispar and paid porters. Spent the night in Abid's house.

13/8 Road now fixed, got jeep to Karimabad, met Lee.

Chapursan

14/8 Lee is better. Bought food and got bus to Sost.

15/8 Got jeep to Raminj in Chapursan Valley. Hired one porter and walked up Lupghar Valley to near Lupghar.

16/8 Walked to near the end of the valley, up the fork west of the Lupghar Pass. Paid porter who left.

17/8 Walked up to a bivi below the unclimbed Gharhil Sar. (Name suggested by local shepherds after the nearest named place ie it means Stoney Pasture Mountain). Good weather at last.

18/8 2am start. Climbed the North Face and NE Ridge to the summit, alpine D. We had thought that the mountain was the highest in the Lupghar Valley, but appearances can be deceptive and there were higher peaks on either side. Here our problems began. We had adopted a somewhat lightweight approach. We had no rope. Lee had a light walking axe, but proper crampons. Pete had light alloy crampons, but a proper axe. Pete gave Lee his axe and he attempted to traverse to one of the higher summits on difficult ice above a huge drop into the Yuksugoz Valley. I was relieved when he gave up the attempt and we started the descent. We had lost time and the descent turned in a bit of an epic as conditions deteriorated and the snow started sliding off the rock-hard ice underneath. Lee's axe was useless as were my crampons. It got dark, we got lost, and we didn't get off the mountain until 10pm. We couldn't find our bivi site and tried to sleep on some rocks until it got light.

19/8 Found our bivi gear two hundred metres away and returned to camp. Rest day.

20/8 Walked back to Raminj carrying our own gear and got a jeep to Sost.

21/8 Bus to Karimabad to collect gear. This effectively marked the end of the expedition, although Lee flew back to the UK on 1 Sept and Pete on 3 Sept.

Overview of the areas visited

From our minor skirmishes around the edges, it was interesting to see the group of mountains between Hispar and Shimshal from both sides. There are many high peaks up to 7800m which have mostly only had one or two ascents. Particularly impressive are the granite walls on the South Face of the unclimbed Kunyang Chhish East and on the South Face of Pumari Chhish South. These faces are over 2500m high, as is the steep North Face of the unclimbed Kuksar II in Chapursan. Other impressive unclimbed peaks in Hispar are Makrong Chhish and Hispar Sar, and Virjerab Peak in Shimshal, although all consist of rather poor rock. No doubt, there many other fine unclimbed peaks, mainly in the remoter areas north of Snow Lake.

Budget

Expenditure		Income	
MSR stove and kit	£120	Mount Everest Foundation	£950
Food, accommodation, transport	£280	British Mountaineering Council	£1100
Expedition food and equipment	£400	Personal contributions	£2200
Porters wages and insurance	£900		
Epigas	£70		
Jeeps	£280		
Flights and visas	£2200		
Total	£4250	Total	£4250

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