

Tajikistan and Afghanistan First Ascents

Expedition 2011

Reference 11/18



Kohe Sauze, Raig Jurm, Wakhan Corridor, Afghanistan

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British Mountaineering Council – Julie Tullis Memorial Award

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Expedition report by Rebecca Coles

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Introduction

The expedition comprised two phases. The first consisted of climbing in the Muzkol Range in the East Pamirs, Tajikistan, whilst the second, involved travelling to neighbouring Afghanistan to climb in the Hindu Kush, Jurm valley along the Wakhan Corridor. Both phases had the aim of making first ascents and bringing back knowledge for future expeditions.

The primary aim in Tajikistan was to climb the last unclimbed 6000 m peak in the Muzkol, after, logistical problems, navigating huge rivers and investigating three different routes, I made the decision that the route was too technical for our team and we retreated. This peak remains unclimbed.

In Afghanistan our first attempt to make an ascent was thwarted by bad weather and again we were forced to retreat. Our second attempt, however, was successful, and we climbed a 5730 m peak on the Afghanistan/Pakistan border. On our return, newly digitally available journal articles from the Himalayan Journal, showed photos which confirmed that this peak had been climbed once before by an Italian team in 1972, although they reported the the altitude to be much lower at 5500 m.

This expedition was part of a wider overland trip where myself and other expedition member, James Kitson, travelled from Kathmandu to London. As such we did not fly in or out of Tajikistan, as most expeditions would when travelling both to the Pamirs and the Afghan Wakhan Corridor.

Expedition Dates:

30th July 2011 - 19th September 2011

Participants:

Rebecca Coles

James Kitson

Mark Redhead (Tajikistan only)

Expedition Aims:

1. To attempt first ascents in the Muzkol Range, Pamirs, East Tajikistan. Including the last unclimbed 6000 m peak in the region.
2. To attempt first ascents in the Jurm valley, Hindu Kush, Wakhan Corridor, Afghanistan.

Background and Planning

Overview of the countries and region



Tajikistan

Situated in Central Asia, Tajikistan's geography is dominated by the Pamir mountains which make up 95% of the country and are sparsely populated. Access to the Pamirs and eastern Tajikistan in general from Dushanbe is via the Pamir Highway built by the Russians in 1930. After the break up of the Soviet Union Tajikistan descended into civil war. It is now stable and generally considered a safe place to travel. The infrastructure, however, is particularly poor, main roads can only be described as tracks in places and internal flights are extremely unreliable. Time must be allowed for travel in country. For example Dushanbe to Murgab takes 2 days of non-stop road travel if all goes well, however it is best to allow 3 days.



Afghanistan

Afghanistan is entirely different, in that the FCO advises against all travel to the Wakhan. This is unfortunate as to date there has been no incident in the Wakhan involving foreigners, since the Russian invasion in the 1980s, however the Wakhan Corridor does lie in the Badakhshan Province where 8 aid workers were killed in 2008. Despite this tourists and mountaineers alike are venturing back into the Wakhan, and there are now even some tour agencies offering specialist tours and a fledgling tourist industry in Iskhashim. General infrastructure is virtually non-existent, there is no electricity beyond what the few generators can supply, no postal service and roads are at best tracks.



Insurance Implications

Expedition members did not have a problem finding insurance for Tajikistan as there were not FCO travel warnings for this area. Insurance was purchased through the BMC. Insurance for Afghanistan, however, proved prohibitively expensive. This was partly complicated by the fact that expedition members were not starting in, and returning to, the UK after the expedition, instead travelling back overland. Therefore the decision was made to go without.

Maps

- Old Soviet 1:50,000 maps covering both Tajikistan and Afghanistan and can be downloaded for example here <http://www.topomapper.com/index.html?zoom=9&lat=55.74869&lon=37.683>
- EWP Eastern Pamir 1:500,000 map.
- The Pamirs tourist map 1:500,000 by Markus Hauser.

For this expedition I made my own maps using GIS software and STRM topographic data (Figure 1).

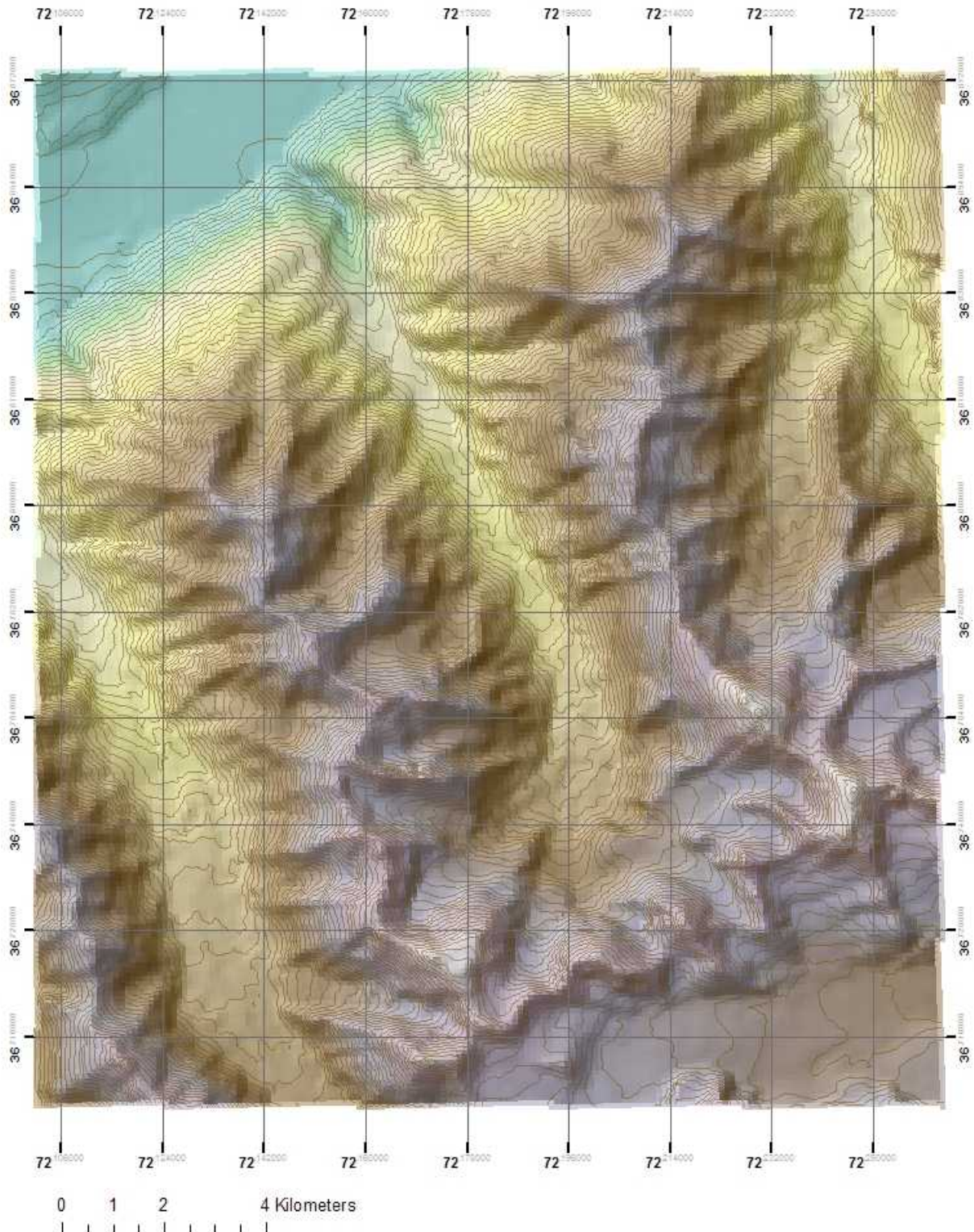


Figure 1 Example map of the Raig Jurm

Communications

Needless to say there is no mobile signal in the mountains however mobile phones can be used in and around Murgab, in Ishkashim and most of the way up the Wakhan towards Khandud using a Tajik network sim card.

There is internet access at the ACTED offices in Murgab which is open intermittently and is run off a generator.

Logistics

This expedition relied on organising all logistics locally. It was surprising to find that things were actually easier to organise in Afghanistan compared to the East Pamirs, Tajikistan.

Local Organisations

The expedition organised logistics for the Tajik element of the expedition out of Murgab. People here had no understanding of the basic requirements for mountaineers and it was a struggle to get the most rudimentary of things organised. META (Murgab Ecotourism Association) has closed down and a local NGO called ACTED (Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development) is trying to field enquire and connect travellers with drivers, but their efforts are piecemeal and unreliable.

In Afghanistan the expedition based itself in the border town of Ishkashim and gateway to the Wakhan Corridor. In contrast to Tajikistan we found it much easier to organise logistics in Afghanistan. In Ishkashim the British run organisation Mountain Unity does an excellent job in signposting visitors to local organisations which can help. I was given the contact details of a local man, Adab, Sharh who aided us in getting the required documentation as well as sourcing a vehicle, driver and donkeys.

Red Tape

Tajikistan:

Tajik Visa – Applied for by post from the Tajik Embassy in London.

GBAO permit is required to go to the Pamirs. This was applied for at the same time as the visa.

Afghanistan:

Afghan visa – Applied for in person at the Afghan Embassy in London.

3 x registration in Iskashim – We paid a local fixer (Adab Shah) a small fee to take expedition members around the required offices in town to register. It took a morning. Have a couple of passport photos and copies of your passport and visa to hand.

1 x registration in Khandud – Again the expedition local fixer helped with this.

Getting there - transport

Transport to Murgab and Iskashim was both by shared car or jeep. Designated long distance taxi stands are found in each town. The price needs to be negotiated and the vehicle goes once full. Expect to pay extra for large amounts of luggage.

Transport from Murgab and Iskashim can be privately hired and arranged by local agencies. Such as ACTED in Murgab and Adab in Iskashim.

Supplies

Food:

Food supplies are very limited in both Murgab and Iskashim and it is strongly recommended that food is bought elsewhere. This expedition bought food in Osh, Kyrgyzstan for Tajikistan and Khorog, Tajikistan for Afghanistan. Although even then imagination was required as food is limited to the basics, for example pasta, rice, tins, cheese, dried fruit.

Stove Fuel:

Petrol is the only available stove fuel. The quality of petrol is very poor and previous expeditions had reported having having problems. Our Primus Omifuel stoves, however, coped well and just required more regular cleaning. Petrol can be bought in Murgab and Iskashim although better

quality fuel might be found elsewhere. Petrol is not allowed to be brought into Afghanistan – but this expedition managed to smuggle it in.

Accommodation

Accommodation in both Tajikistan and Afghanistan is based around a homestay set-up. In Murgab we stayed at the very comfortable Erali guesthouse. In Ishkashim the homestay prices are set by the Aga Khan Foundation and the standard is all quite similar. All meals can be provided at the homestay.

Introduction to the mountain ranges

The Pamirs create a high plateau in Central Asia with heights over 7000 m. In East Tajikistan the plateau is very arid and prone to high winds.

The Hindu Kush are found in Afghanistan and Pakistan and again have peaks over 7000 m.

Mountaineering history

The Pamirs were extensively explored by the Russians, whilst the Hindu Kush has traditionally attracted British and Western European mountaineers.

The Russians climbed several peaks in the Muzkol including Bitkaya and Nymra were explored by the Leningrad Sport Team in 1986, Chatagai in 1986 and Soviet Officers peak in 1989. Then in 1996 a British expedition organised by the company EWP made a trip to climb first ascents (Appendix 1). EWP trips to the Muzkol continued annually until 1999 (Appendix 2 and 3) when a fatality on Zartosh Peak occurred (Appendix 3). Another attempt on Zartosh Peak was made in 2000 but without success. In 2010 an MEF sponsored team finally summited Zartosh Peak, claiming the first ascent (Appendix 5).

The Jurm valley in Afghanistan has been visited twice before, once in 1972 (Appendix 7 and 8) and then again in 1973 (Appendix 9), both by Italian expeditions. Unfortunately the 1973 expedition was not known about prior to this expedition's departure and the report for the 1972 expedition (Appendix 7) noted poor estimates of altitudes, grossly underestimating some heights whilst confusing the the height of Jurm I, this misleading information led this expedition to believe that they had initially made a first ascent.

Tajikistan First Ascents Expedition 2011

Team Members

Rebecca Coles

James Kitson

Mark Redhead

Summary Itinerary

30 th July – 3 rd August	Travel from UK to the Murgab, Eastern Pamirs via Dushanbe (for Mark only)
3 rd – 5 th August	Acclimatisation
5 th – 7 th August	Getting to Base Camp
8 th August	Rest Day
9 th – 12 th August	Summit attempt
13 th August	Rest day
14 th August	Second summit attempt
15 th – 17 th August	Walk out. Night in Murgab
18 th August	Murgab to Khorog
19 th – 21 st August	Khorog back to the UK (Mark only)

Acclimatisation

Several days were spent in Murgab (3500 m) acclimatising. The team then travelled along the Pamir Highway by jeep, over the Highway's highest pass, Ak- Baital at 4655 m to a yurtstay (4200 m) at the side of the Pamir Highway (Figure 3). Two nights were spent at the yurt to aid acclimatisation, allowing a recce of the approach route (Figure 2) and the organisation of donkeys to carry the loads.



Figure 2 Acclimatisation trek following the dry river bed, with Ximena Peak in the background



Figure 3 The yurt stay beside the Pamir Highway, looking back in the direction of Murgab, loading the donkeys and preparing to start.

Access and walk in

The expedition followed the same approach route as the 1996 EWP Muzkol expedition. This involved following a river bed (Figure 2) (best done early when the river is low or even non-existent) to where the valley steepened leading to a final steep scree slope and a pass. The donkeys, together with local man as handlers, which the expedition had hired to carry loads to a Base Camp, were unfamiliar with the pass and, as the slope steepened, did not wish to continue. They unloaded the donkeys and left at around 4680 m. Once the kit was reorganised and the expedition continued with full loads. It was apparent that the the donkeys would have only been able to ascend another 150 m or so as the re-entrant narrowed and became impassable for pack animals. The narrowing was due to a rock fall.

All expedition members found the pass tough with full loads at the altitude of 5080 m (Figure 4).

The descent was steep but straight forward.



Figure 4 Photo from the pass looking showing the descent.

The expedition made an intermediate camp to allow shuttling of kit over the pass and this camp became equipment cache 2.

Recommendation: Instead of using this pass for access into the Muzkol the expedition found out that it is possible to drive to the head to the valley from the Pamir Highway and hire horses and donkeys to take loads into a Base Camp. Several geologists from Dushanbe University has taken this route in (Figure 5).



Figure 5 Google earth image of walk in. M41 is the Pamir Highway. Red line is the walk in to Base Camp. Yellow line is the approach to the mountain. The blue dashed line is the recommended walk in for future expeditions. Note the Zartosh Peak mark here is not the Zartosh Peak climbed by the MEF funded expedition in 2009

Base Camp

The expedition set up a Base Camp (Figure 6) by two springs at 4190 m. It was sheltered and gave access to good water. There was evidence that the locals had also used it as a camp.



Figure 6 Base Camp

Approach

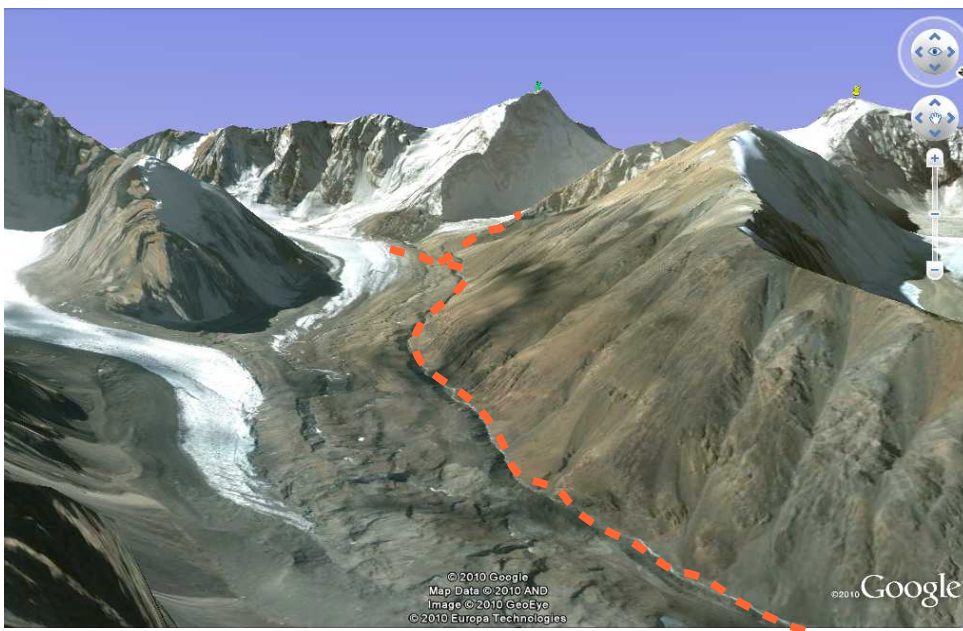


Figure 7 Google Earth image of the approach. The route to the right of the glacier was taken.



Figure 8 Photo taken from near Base Camp, across the river to the access valley, Dvuglavy in the background.

Essentially two obstacles had to be overcome in order to access the mountain. Firstly, a large river had to be crossed (Figure 9). After receiving a crossing point it was established that the river could only be crossed safely at 6 am, when it was at its lowest. It made a very cold start to the day.



Figure 9 The river which required fording.

Secondly, the glacier moraines needed to be negotiated. This was simpler as easy passage could be gained by walking up the right hand side of the glacier in between the lateral moraine and valley side (Figure 10). Again this was easier at the start of the day when there was no melt water.



Figure 10 Walking in between the glacier lateral moraine and the valley wall.

Access onto the glacier could then be gained higher up the valley by climbing the lateral moraine and onto the ice. Once on the glacier the expedition had no problems regarding crevasses as there were very few (Figure 11).



Figure 11 Easy walking on the glacier

Summit attempts and routes

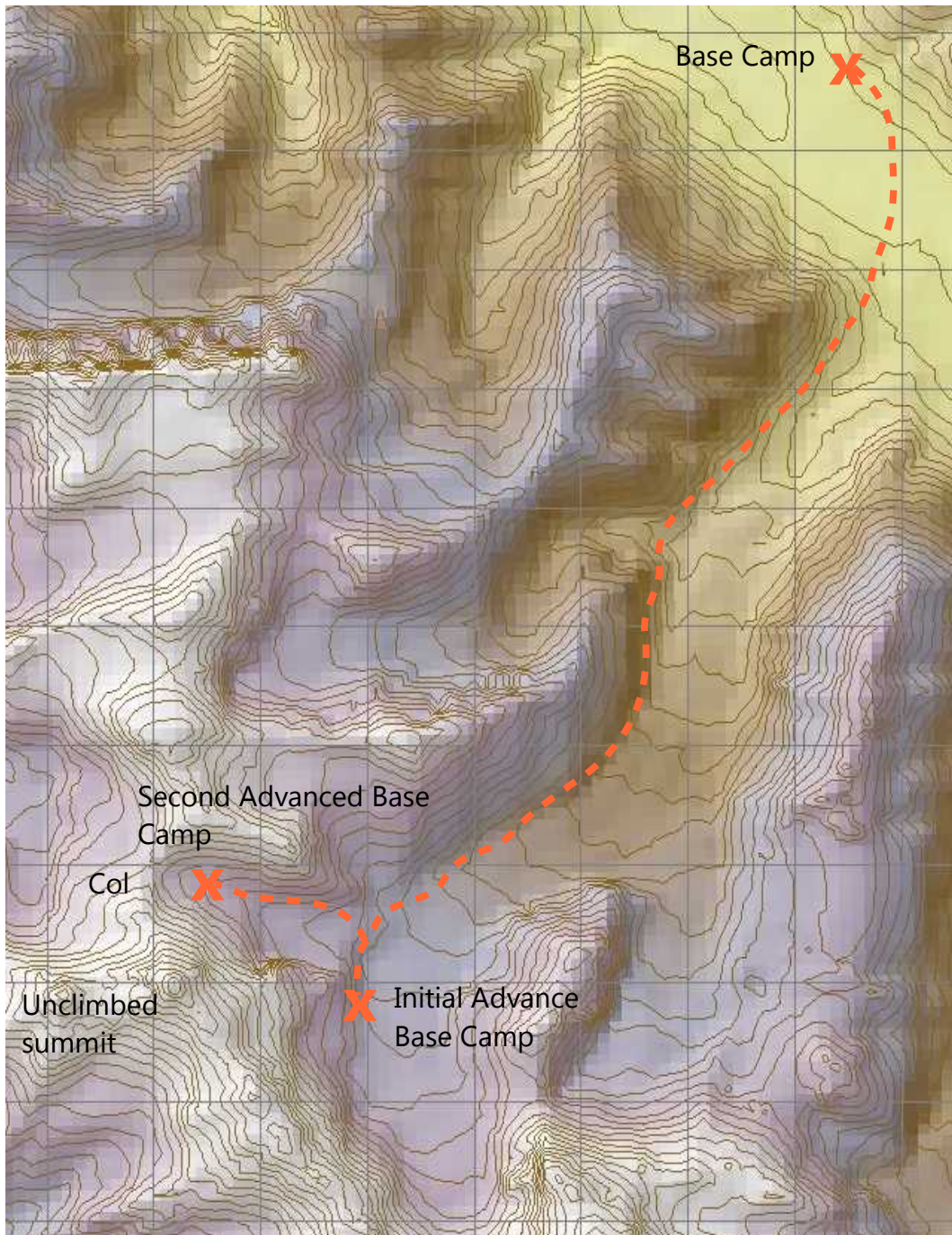


Figure 12 Map showing the approach from Base Camp and the locations of two Advance Base Camps. For scale, each square is 1 km.



Figure 13 View of the expedition objective from the approach.

Initially an Advance Base Camp was establish on the main glacier below the peak, see Figure 12 for location. Figures 13 and 14 show photographs of this camp. From this location a route was investigated.



Figure 13 Initial Advanced Base Camp site. Photo shows Dvuglavy on the left climbed by EWP in 1996 and the col at the head of the valley which they also identified.



Figure 14 The same Advance Base Camp looking towards the tributary glacier which was used to access the pass and site of the second Advance Base Camp position (route marked).

Route 1 (Figure 15 and 16) was not attempted as there was concern that the route took a line beneath an ice fall, as well as incorporating a steep section above the ice fall which was deemed too technical for both the expedition member's experience and equipment.



Figure 15 This photo shows Route 1. Concern was that the route traversed beneath a ice fall. It was also thought not viable due to a steep section immediately after the ice fall.

The expedition then moved the Advanced Base Camp up onto a tributary glacier at 4930 m to explore other routes (Figure 12). From this camp a col could be gained via a straight forward snow slope (Figure 16-18). The col was at 5530 m. Route two was considered more technical still, encompassing a steep rock arête (Figure 18 and 19) .

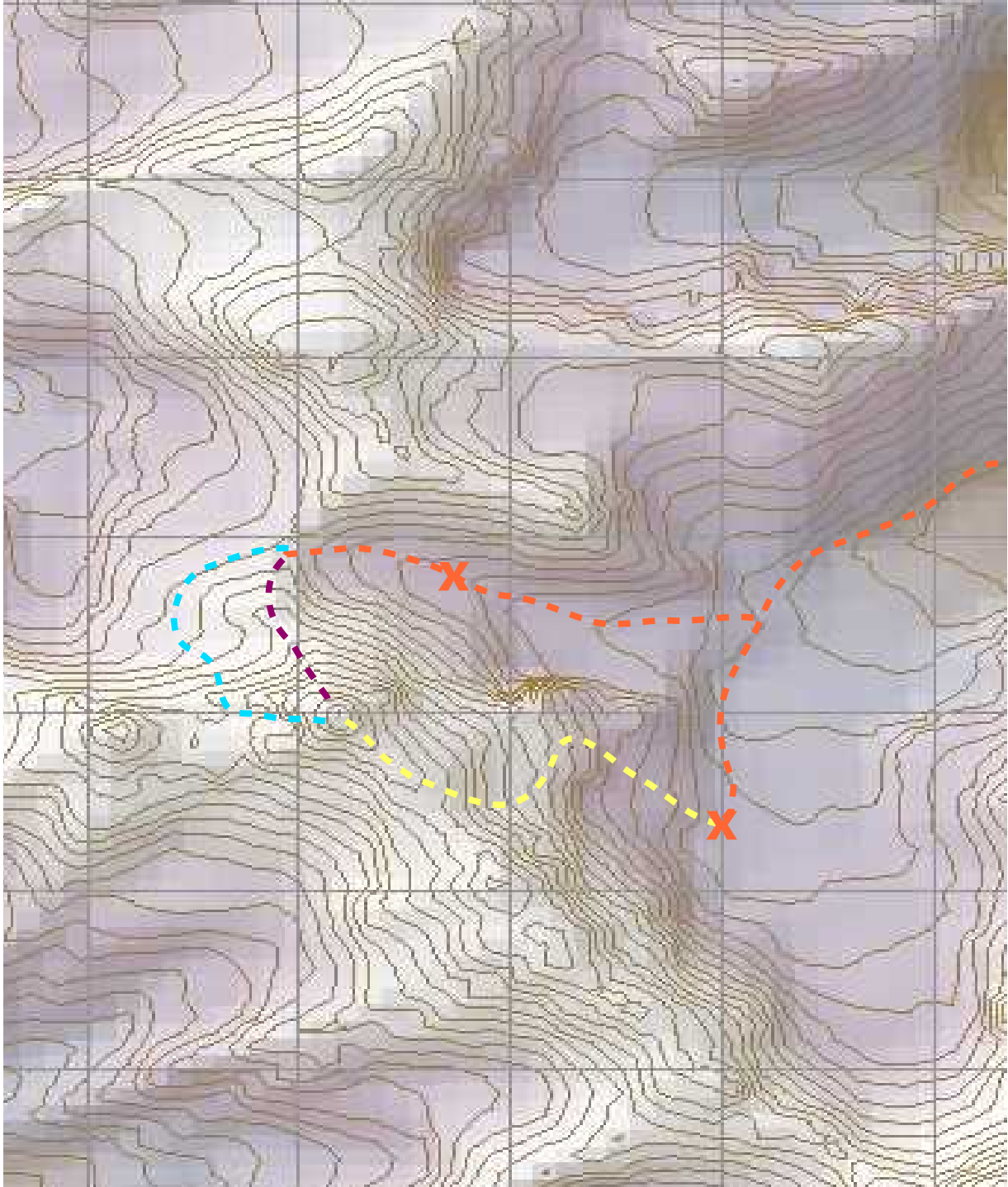


Figure 16 Recced routes. Orange line is the approach route with crosses denoting Advance Base Camps used. Yellow Route 1. Purple Route 2 and Blue Route 3 both from the 5530 m col.



Figure 17 Climbing from Advanced Base Camp to the 5530 m col.



Figure 18 Just below the 5530 m col looking towards the summit across the technical mixed ridge known as Route 2 (Figure 16).



Figure 19 On the col looking at Route 2 to the summit. This shows a technical mixed route.

After another recce found an alternative route, number three, and this was deemed the most viable. This route entailed climbing the snowy headwall of the tributary valley to a pass at 5530 m (Figure 15 – 19), as for Route 2, and then descending into another tributary valley before attempting to ascend the valley side to a ridge which appeared to give access to the summit (Figure 16). The expedition team crossed to the valley side and initially the going was good when ascending this slope, the firm neve being manageable with single mountaineering axes and snow stakes for protection. However, this became firmer and required climbing facing in, using our crampon front points. It was due to the increased technical requirements of the climb that the decision was made to retreat (Figure 20).



Figure 20 James with the steep wall behind. The route the expedition took is marked as a dashed line. The cross marks the point at which the expedition retreated. The top crevasse was the point at which the expedition belayed and started to pitch the route. It was on the second pitch that the expedition turned back. Using this as an estimate of scale, it would take 6 to 8 rope lengths to gain the ridge. Beyond this steep section the ridge leads to the summit to the left.

Another summit attempted

With time running out, due to the need to allow 3 days to shuttle the kit back over the pass to the Pamir Highway, an attempt on a minor peak close to Base Camp was made. Again retreat without summit success was necessary due to an impassable loose rock band near the summit (Figure 21 and 22).



Figure 21 James and Mark taking in the view.



Figure 22 The view of the peak showing the loose rock to the summit.

Muzkol Coordinates

N38° 36'36.9" E073°31'39.2"	4320m	Drop off
38° 33'39.1" E073°27'45.5"	4680m	Cache 1
N38° 33'15.8" E073°27'07.7"	5080m	Pass
N38° 32'29.0" E073°25'40.5"	4240m	Cache 2
N38° 31'54.9" E073°25'38.6"	4190m	Base Camp
N38° 28'51.2" E073°22'29.6"	4930m	Advanced Base Camp
N38° 28'54.5" E073°21'54.6"	5530m	High Pass

Summary

The Muzkol range offers remote and varied mountaineering, from snow plods and scrambles to technical alpine ascents. The arid nature of the climate means that the snow line is high (approx 5400 m) during the summer months and the glaciers relatively benign. The greatest natural obstacle this expedition encountered was the rivers fed by snow melt. The area is remote and the local people, although used to tourists are not familiar with the needs of mountaineers. Logistics, especially food supplies, need to be carefully planned. A Soviet-style of service should be anticipated. The area almost certainly offers the chance for more first ascents. It is highly recommended that the high pass this expedition took to Base Camp from the Pamir Highway is avoided and instead a route up the valley is taken.

Jurm Valley, Hindu Kush, Wakhan Corridor, Afghanistan

Team Members

Rebecca Coles

James Kitson

Summary Itinerary

24 th August	Travel from Khorog to Ishkashim, Afghanistan
25 th August	Obtain permissions in Ishkashim and drive to Khandud
26 th – 27 th August	Walk in
28 th August	Rest Day
29 th August	Recce
30 th August – 3 rd September	First summit attempt
4 th – 5 th September	Rest/dry out day
6 th September	Return to high camp
7 th September	Summit
8 th September	Return to base camp
9-10 th September	Base camp to road head
11-13 th September	Ishkashim
13 th -18 th September	Khorog
19 th September	Travel from Khorog to Dushanbe

Acclimatisation

The expedition members were already well acclimatised after the Muzkol phase of the expedition, so there was little need to spend time adjusting to the altitude. Ishkashim is at 2800 m where and it was here that the expedition spent one night. A second night was spent in Khandud at a similar altitude. The following two days were then spent walking into Base Camp. This walk could have easily been done in one day but two were taken to ensure that the donkey men did not suffer, this also allowed them to get back to their village on the second day and prevented them from having to overnight at Base Camp.

Access and walk in

The walk in was very straight forward. The valley is often used for grazing and a path leads up the east side of the valley (Figure 23 and 28). There are several stone shelters (Figure 24) and a rudimentary irrigation system in the lower part of the valley, as well as evidence of domestic animals, although we did not see anyone during the time we were in Raig Jurm. The expedition camped overnight at the last level grassy area to allow the donkeys to graze (Figure 25 and 28). An interesting natural feature, just above this intermediary camp, was a series of gushing springs providing clear water to the valley. The springs were big enough to be rivers in there own right. It is possible to take a route above them. The path then peters out and the route then continues through moraines (Figure 26). The donkeys coped well. A Base Camp was established at 4200 m.



Figure 23 The walk in, looking back towards the Wakhan valley and Tajikistan north of the Oxus River. Note the well used path.



Figure 24 A shepherd's hut in the Raig Jurm



Figure 25 Intermediary camp during walk in



Figure 26 Route above the intermediary camp

Base Camp

The expedition base camp was on a flat section in amongst the moraines with a glacial melt stream close by (Figure 27 and 28). The water needed to be collected in the morning to minimise the glacial flour in the water. After the storm the water supply dwindled to a trickle and in hindsight a Base Camp may have been better located at the intermediary camp (Figure 25) where there was access to the clear spring water.



Figure 27 Base Camp. Mountains in the background are in Tajikistan Pamirs.

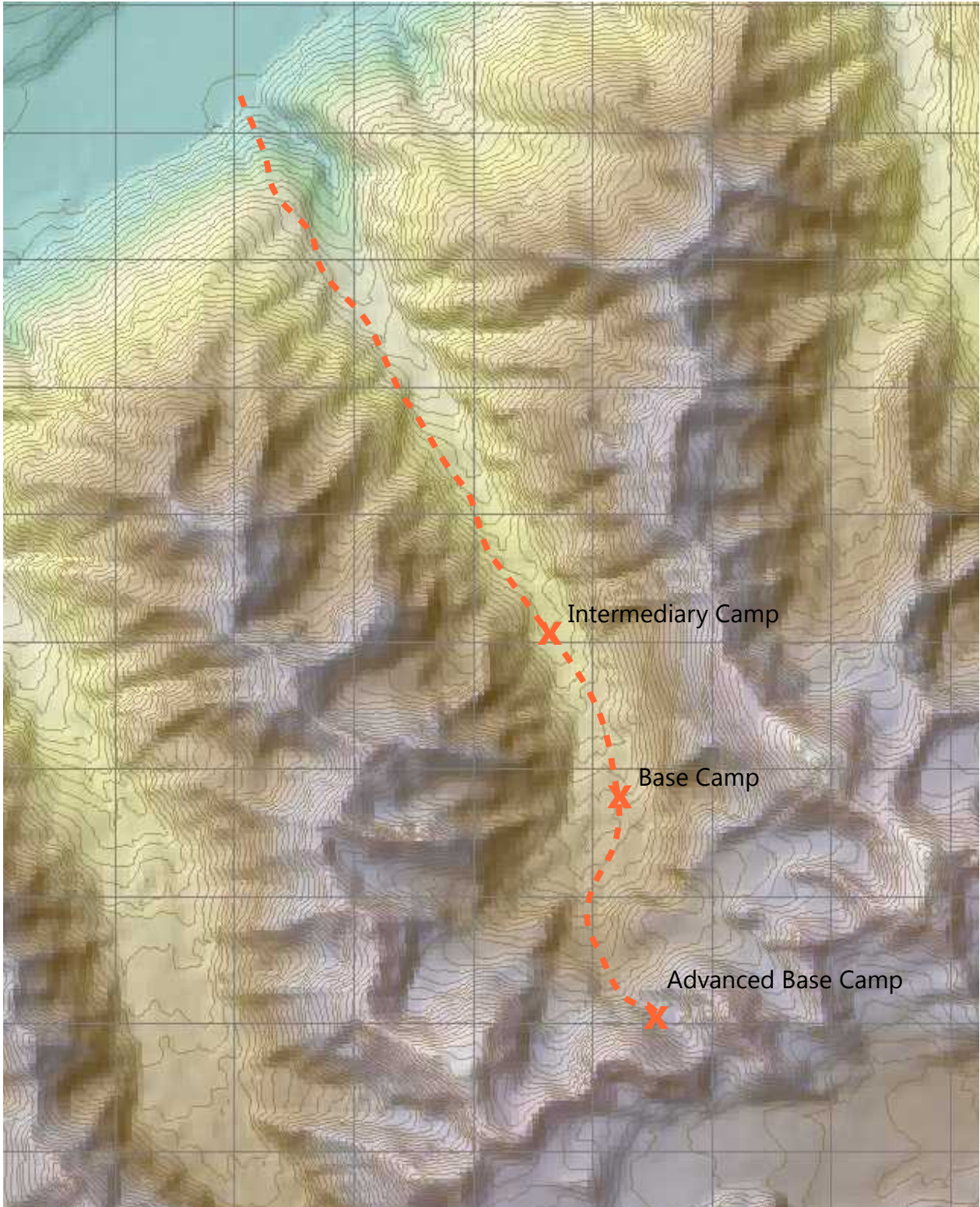


Figure 28 The dashed line shows the walk in and approach route. Crosses show the locations of camps.

Approach

From Base Camp a route to an Advanced Base Camp was established through moraines and onto the a glacier (Figure 28 and 29). The glacier was extremely crevassed (Figure 30) and it took a long time to workout a route through the these. Being late in the season, late August into September, the the glacier was at its driest and most open making it easy to see the crevasses but difficult to negotiated them. Just above the crevassed section of the glacier we set up an Advanced Base Camp at 4920 m.



Figure 29 Negotiating moraines



Figure 30 Crevasses on approach

Advanced Base Camp

The Advanced Base Camp was sited on the glacier above the most severe crevasses and just below the snowline at 4920 m (Figure 31). Melt water could be gathered during the day. The site was also away from obvious rockfall and avalanche threats.



Figure 31 Advanced Base camp. Ahead lies the col with notch demarcating the Afghan / Pakistan border and the summit ridge to the right.

The Route to the Summit

From Advanced Base Camp the route to the summit continued up the glacier to just before the col and border between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Figure 35 and 37). From there the easiest line to the summit was taken, this included a line just below a small stable ice cliff (Figure 36) traversing rightwards to a steady incline to the summit (Figure 32 and 34). After several false summits the top was reached and consisted of a broad dome (Figure 33).

The route was graded PD+.

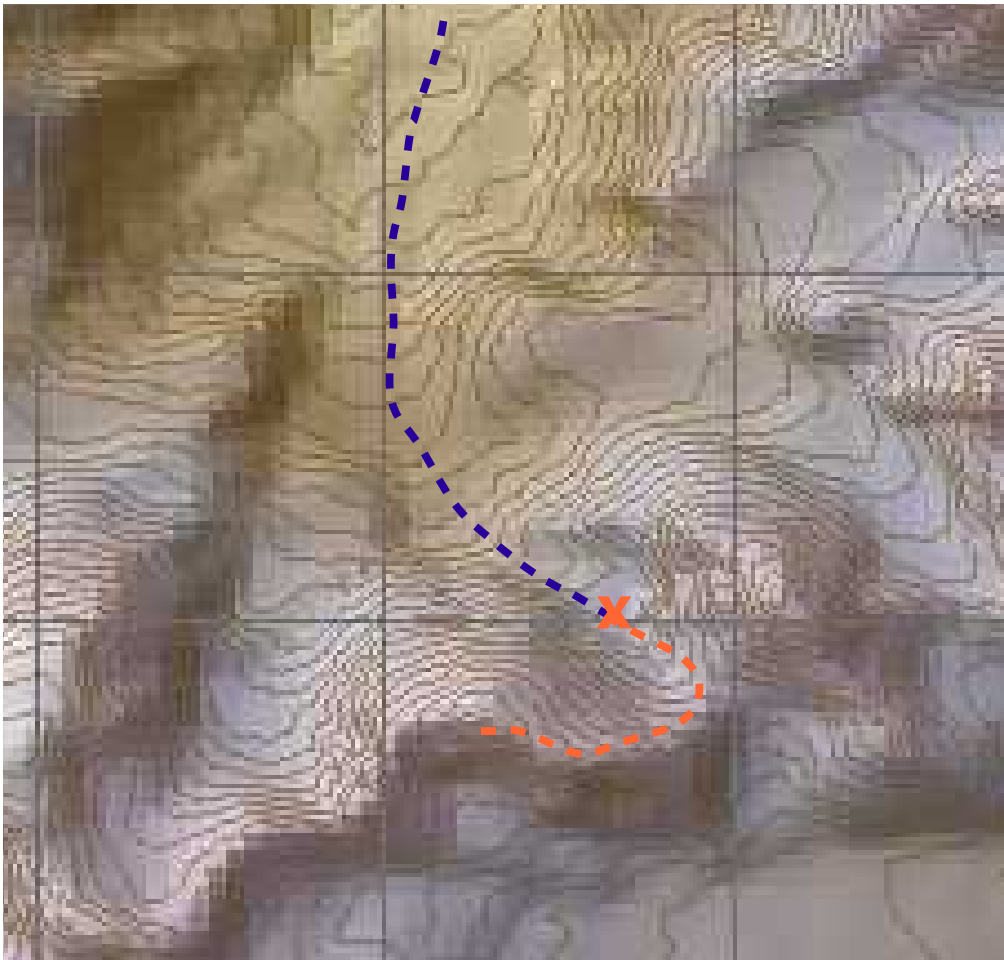


Figure 32 Position of Advanced Base Camp (cross), route to the Advanced Base Camp (blue dashed line and the route to the summit (orange dashed line).



Figure 33 Kohe Sauze see Appendix 7 and in particular Plate 1 for the 1972 Italian Jurm Expedition. The 1972 expedition followed the East Face (the ridge on the left horizon in this photo) this was also the route which this expedition took.

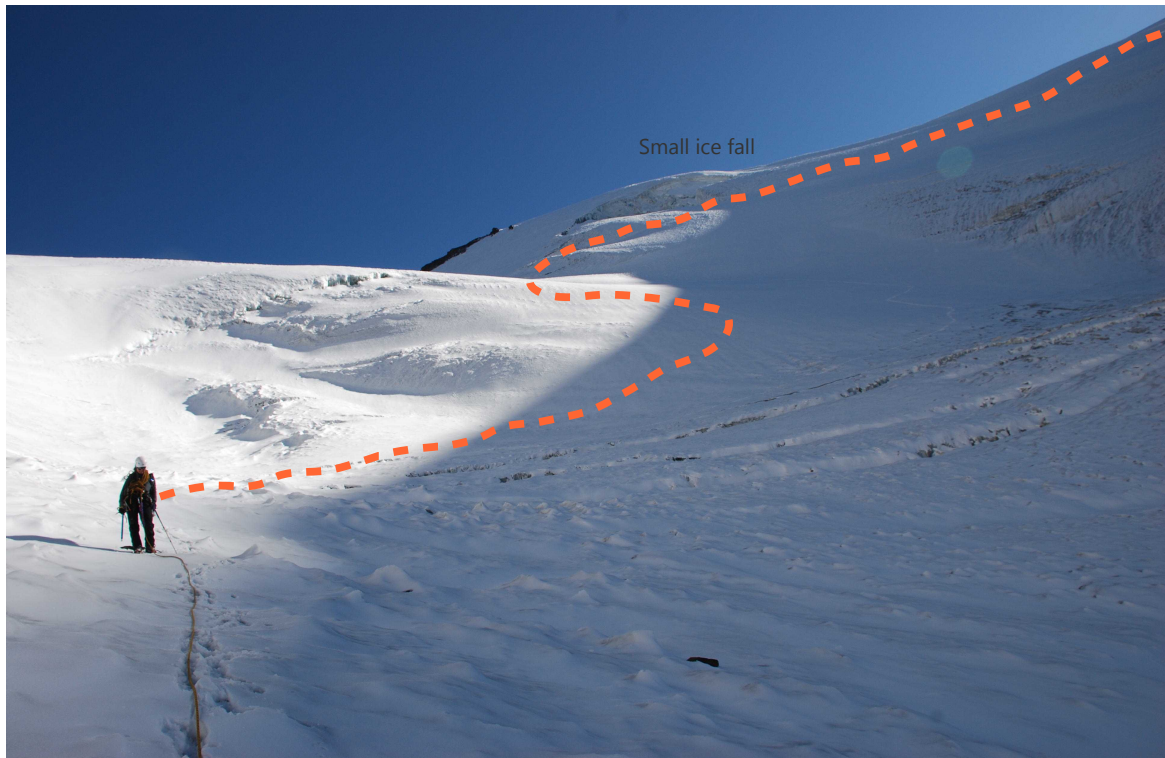


Figure 34 Route to summit via East face shown in orange dash line. Also showing location of small ice fall.



Figure 35 Nearing the rotten rock ridge which demarcates the Afghan / Pakistan border.



Figure 36 Resting below the small ice fall



Figure 37 Looking back down the East face along the rotten rock ridge and Afghan / Pakistan border to the col with notch and beyond to Kohe Stara (the Star Peak).

Jurm Valley Coordinates

N 36° 45'56.9" E072° 11'44.7"	4200m	Base Camp
N 36° 43'55.3" E072° 12'07.3"	4920m	Advanced BC
N 36° 43'54.1" E072° 12'21.6"	5010m	Col
N 36° 43'23.6" E072° 12'00.6"	5730m	Summit

Summary

The Wakhan Hindu Kush offers isolated and varied mountaineering. With peaks up to 7000 m, technical lines as well as snow plods. The biggest logistical problem involves getting to the Wakhan, as a route through Tajikistan is currently the safest option security-wise. Once in the Wakhan accessing the Hindu Kush mountains is relatively easy off the main Wakhan valley. An understanding of the requirements for mountaineers seems to have been retained from the region's mountaineering heyday of the 1960s and 1970s as this expedition found locals to be very accommodating. However, everything an expedition requires needs to be brought from Tajikistan and this should be planned for. Regarding the Jurm Valley the 1973 expedition report (Appendix 9), found on return from this expedition, reports that there are few first ascents left in this valley, however still provides a worthwhile destination for new routes. More than ever, as mountaineers in this part of the world, this expedition found it rewarding to work with and employ local people who were dignified, honest and generous. It was a honour to contribute to their livelihoods – hopefully a resurgence in mountaineering in the Wakhan can play a part in providing an income for communities in the future.

Additional Information

Budget

Summary Budget for all members of the expedition in UK pounds sterling:

Income		Expenditure	
MEF Grant	£1,500	Visas	£550
Julie Tullis	£350	Flight	£400 (Mark only)
Jeremy Willson	£1,000	Insurance	£1,700
		Food & Local services	£2,000
Total	£2,850	Total	£4,650

Although it is difficult to break down the exact amounts for the expedition as it was part of a longer 9 month trip, for example insurance costs encompassed 9 months of travel and mountaineering, but below is a more detailed expenditure in cost per person for the visas, food and local services mentioned above.

Tajikistan (3 team members)

Tajik visa and GBAO permit	£150
Food and Fuel (camping)	\$80
Transport from Osh to Murgab	\$40
Transport from Murgab to start of trek (return)	\$60
Transport from Murgab to Khorog	\$40
Transport from Khorog to Dushanbe	\$60
Donkeys	\$25
Accommodation including meals (6 nights in Murgab)	\$90
Accommodation including meals (2 nights in Yurtstay)	\$30
Total per person	\$525

Afghanistan (2 team members)

Afghan visa	£50
Accommodation and meals in Khorog, TJ (5 nights)	\$100
Paperwork in Ishkashim	\$15
Employment of fixer	\$25
Transport from Khorog to border (return)	\$20

Transport from border to Ishkashim and back	\$20
Transport to start of trek and back	\$150
Donkeys and men for 4 days	\$40
Food and fuel (camping) bought in Khorog, TJ	\$100
Accommodation including meals (4 nights)	\$95
Total per person	\$685

Kit and equipment

Personal clothing

Crampons

Walking ice Axe

Helmet

Harness

slings

Screwgate Karabiners

Snapgate Karabiners

3 x Prusik loops

4 x ice screws

4 x snow stakes

1 x 50 m rope

1 x 30 m rope

Mountain tent

2 x primus omi-fuel stoves

1 x lightweight gas stove

4 season sleeping bag

Roll mat

Thermarest

Daysack

65 litre Rucksack

Holdall

Resources

Apart from the appendixes attached other useful resources are detailed below

Tajikistan:

EWP - <http://www.ewpnet.com/>

The alpine Journal, The Great Game by David Keaton

http://www.alpinejournal.org.uk/Contents/Contents_1999_files/AJ%201999%20125-135%20Keaton%20Muzkol.pdf

The Alpine Journal, Russia and Central Asia 1996, Jose Luis Bermudez and Paul Knott

http://www.alpinejournal.org.uk/Contents/Contents_1997_files/AJ%201997%20255-258%20Russia%20Cent%20Asia.pdf

The Alpine Journal, Russia and Central Asia 1999, Paul Knott

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Appendixes

Appendix 1 – EWP 1996 Muzkol Expedition Report

<http://www.ewpnet.com/news96.htm>

Virgin summit ascents in Muzkol (Pamir)

An EWP group of climbers (8 from western Europe plus 5 Russians) visited the remote and virtually unvisited Muzkol Range in the Eastern Pamir of Tadjikistan this summer. The main aim of the expedition was to climb virgin summits. This turned out to be a perfect region as most of the summits, including many six thousanders, were still unclimbed. A further attraction of the area is the relatively stable, dry weather enjoyed by the region which is located in what is almost a high altitude semi-desert.

A major problem of mounting an expedition to the Muzkol Range is access. The range is located near the Chinese border and is best reached via Kirghizstan. The 250 mile drive from Osh in Kirghizstan to Muzkol is rough and the road winds its way up and down several passes, many over 4000m high. It passes the eastern edge of the Muzkol Range but is separated from the main mountain area by a 5100m pass which has to be crossed by foot. The alternative involves flying by helicopter - a very expensive alternative. Further problems relate to special permits that are required to enter this sensitive area. In 1996 it was required that the group passports were taken to Khojand to have the entry permit stamped in to them.

Camp on the first day was established not far from the road at 4200m. The following day the group moved to a slightly higher camp located a short distance from the 5100m pass. After a further acclimatisation day the group moved over the easy snow and scree pass to descend into the Muzkol Valley where base camp was established at 4100m on a meadow by a spring several hundred metres away from the Muzkol river itself. In the following few days the Russian support group carried out the mammoth task of portering extra food and equipment supplies over the pass.

The group spent the first days exploring the base camp area. There was almost no sign of human activity in the valley and wildlife was plentiful, the most common animals seen were marmots, ibex, snow cocks and eagles. Snow leopard tracks were plentiful but these shy animals themselves were never seen.

The first problem was the crossing of the Muzkol River, at low water (4am-1pm) the river could be easily waded almost anywhere; however by late afternoon the crossing was dangerous and it was almost the cause of a disaster on the first day when one person tried to return across it too late in the afternoon. A rescue party went out to help him and in spite of a rope he was swept off his feet and had to be pulled across arriving on the other side slightly the worse for wear. For the rest of the trip all river crossings were timed for the low-water period.

After two days an advance camp had been established on a glacier at 5000m below two six thousanders. On the 6th August summit 5875m, a shapely snow and rock pyramid was climbed by the majority of the group. The summit, later named Snow Leopard Peak, was reached in 4 hours, in perfect weather, and provided climbing technically about ADinf involving snow slopes with a few steeper, slightly icy sections.

In the following days the group divided up and a variety of mountains were tackled including both of the six thousanders. A summary of the main ascents carried out is given below, Russian numeric grades together with UIAA grades are given:

6th August: Snow Leopard Peak, 5875m. 2b, III. First ascent. Bjorn Andersson, Vince Diamond, Paul Hampson, Andrew Hilton, Mark Richard, Colin Sprange, Norman Veitch and Andrew Wielochowski. South Face and East Ridge.

9th August: Shattered Point, 5320m. 1a, I. First ascent. Colin Sprange. By west ridge. Easy rocks and scree.

11th August: Dvuglavny, 6148m. 5a, V in ascent; 2a, III in descent. First ascent. Mark Richard and Andrew Wielochowski. NW face to west ridge and south face. Sustained icy slopes and two, short, steep chimneys led up the NW face to the easy upper sections of the west ridge and hence the easy glaciated south side of the mountain. The south side was descended to a point below and south of col 5550m which was then crossed to regain advanced camp.

11th August: Gipsovy, 5918m. 1b, II. First ascent. Vince Diamond, Andrew Hilton, Robert Krymski, Valeri Reznik, Norman Veitch and Zhenia Yemelianov. By the south face and east ridge. Scree, easy rock and snow.

12th August: Ximena, 5422m. 2b, III. First ascent. Martin Waldhör and Sasha Zamorujev. By the NE face of south summit. Snow.

13th August: Ximena, 5422m. 2b, III. Bjorn Andersson. By traverse of NW ridge starting from col 5100m. Mainly snow, several minor tops are traversed along the route.

13th August: Grud, 4937m. 1a, I. First ascent. Colin Sprange. From the NW. Easy scree slopes. The history of climbing in the Muzkol Range is short in time and content. The area was first properly explored by Russian geologists who identified the high and steep south face of Bitkaya as a top-quality challenge. In 1986 and 1989 routes climbed on the face gained first places in the Soviet Championships.

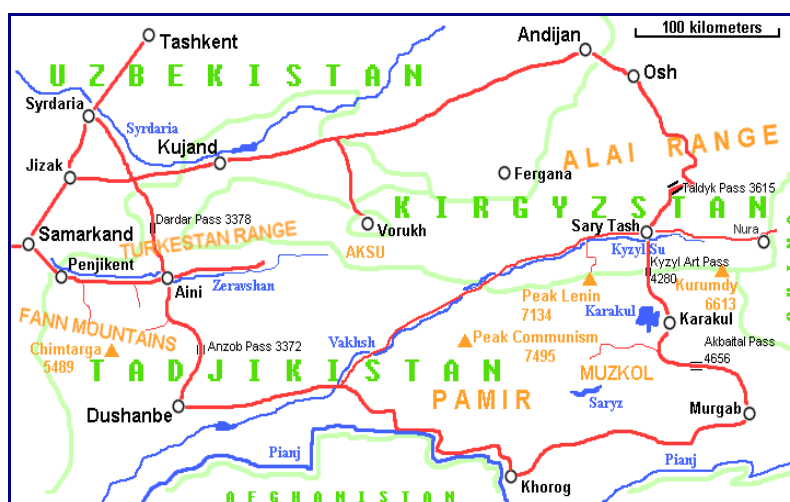
Summary of previous ascents (with Russian grades):
1986 Bitkaya, 6074m, SE Face, 6, Shak
1986 Chatagai, 6133m, East Face, 5a, Glushkov
1988 Bitkaya, 6074m, SE, 6a, Mochnikov
1988 Bitkaya, 6074m, SE Face, 6a, Ostanin
1988 Bitkaya, 6074m, South Face, 6, Semiletkin
1989 Soviet Officers, 6233m, S Face, 4b, Timoshenko
1989 Bitkaya, 6074m, South Face, 5b, Yemelianov
1989 Bitkaya, 6074m, South Face, 6a, Semiletkin
1994 summit 5647m, North Face, 6a, Semiletkin
1994 summit 5647m, North Face, 5b, Korotkin
1994 summit 5700m, W Face, 5a, Kolchanov.

Appendix 2 - EWP 1998 Muzkol Expedition Report

[Muzkol 96-98 Map](#) | [Muzkol 99 Map](#) | [Central Asia Map](#)

In 1996 an EWP expedition was the first West European group to visit the Muzkol, a little explored range in the south-eastern Pamir of Tadjikistan. Several unclimbed summits were conquered and many more exciting future possibilities discovered. In 1997 EWP again visited the Muzkol. Base camp was established on the Zartoshkol (Muzkol) river some 20 miles north of the 1996 camp. Several virgin five thousand meter summits were climbed together with two six thousanders (both over 20,000 feet high). In 1998 the 1997 base camp was again used on account of the easy vehicle access. The group comprised 3 American, 9 English, 2 Welsh and 3 Russian climbers, together with a Russian cook, her son and a Russian doctor.

Part of the journey from Osh in Kirgizia to Muzkol follows the Chinese border and it is also the main road leading to the sensitive Afghan border areas. For these reasons there is a high degree of security along the route with many checkpoints. Luckily in 1998 one of the checkpoints was abolished - at Kyzylart Pass (4280m) - and also the group was not searched once. As a result the journey in both directions went very smoothly.



[Click to enlarge the access map](#)

After a rest day the group set off to make the ascent of 5500.6m, a small peak located on the ridge system leading off north-west from Peak Muzkolski (itself climbed in 1997). They camped the first night at Vanishing Lake (4300m), then at "Cwm Bivouac" (c4900m) located about 1.5km north-east of point summit. On the 16th of August, John Cederholm, John Clarke, Igor Gavrilov, Paul Hampson, Antony Hollinshead, Cerith Jones, Doug and Harvey Jones, David Keaton, Chris Kinney, Valeri Rezhnik, Colin Sprange, Stephen Taylor, Kevin Turner, and Duncan Woods reached the summit of 5500.6m and called it "Four Nations Peak". The ascent took three hours of easy scrambling, scree and snow slopes. The climb was rated Russian 2b (Alpine II or PD). Cederholm, Clarke, Hollinshead, Keaton and Kinney and continued south for about 1.5km. to take in two further points which they named "Point Theresa" (c5475m) and "Point Marina" (c5500m) after wives. The ridge provided excellent views of Zartosh East and West (the latter subsequently named "White Pyramid") together with the unclimbed and very impressive peak 5960m.

The group then set off up into the Zartosh Glacier cirque. One night was spent at "Moraine Ridge Camp" (c4500), a fine, west-facing, sheltered hollow offering good views of Peak Communism to the west. On the 20th August "Glacier Camp" was established at 5050m and was used for the next few days as a base to explore and climb in the beautiful Zartosh cirque. On the 21st August "Leopard's Tooth", c5520m, was ascended by its elegant, snowy, north ridge by Cederholm, Clarke, Hollinshead, C, D & H Jones, Keaton, Kinney, Sprange, Taylor, Turner, Woods and Andrew Wielochowski. This unique feature forms an "island peak" in the centre of the cirque and is dominated by the surrounding giants. The ascent took 3 hours and was rated Russian 2b (Alpine II or PD). On the following day Hampson and Clark attempted to reach col 5300m leading out of the cirque into the Bozbaital valley to the SE; steep snowy scree slopes and rotten rock put them off. At the same time Hollinshead and Wielochowski ventured onto the superb, 700m, icy north face of Zartosh confirming its great potential for some excellent ice routes.



**Base Camp by the Zartoshkol river
Fay and Panorama Peaks in the background.**

On the 23rd August Cederholm, Clarke, Gavrilov, Hampson, Hollinshead, C, D & H Jones, Keaton, Kinney, Rezhnik, Taylor, Turner, Wielochowski, Woods plus Sergei Semiletkin, the Russian veteran of the Muzkol, set off at 6am for the first ascent of the White Pyramid (c6060m). After 1½ hours they reached the end of the Zartosh glacier. A 40 degree snow slope led to the snowy north ridge. This was followed over steepenings to a broader section, several large crevasses were easily avoided and the col between Zartosh and the White Pyramid was reached soon after midday. An easy snow ridge led to the summit. The col and summit were estimated to be 6000m and 6060m high respectively. The ascent of the White Pyramid was rated Russian 3b (Alpine III or ADsup).



Ascending the White Pyramid (right).
Zartosh summit to the right.

From the summit of the White Pyramid a possible route up Zartosh could be seen: an icy snow couloir led up from the col towards a rockier area above which the angled appeared to ease. After descend to the col several members of the group started up the couloir but turned back on account of deteriorating weather and lack of adequate equipment.

The original aim of the expedition was to climb the main peak of Zartosh. In the event the White Pyramid, the west summit of Zartosh, was identified as an attractive and easier initial target which could be climbed with a minimum of equipment. After the successful ascent of this summit by all bar one member of the team there seemed insufficient time in the last two days of the trip to reascend to the col from where Zartosh would be most easily tackled. This will be one of our objectives for 1999 with the added idea of tackling this magnificent twenty thousand foot summit by one of the excellent looking ice routes on the north face. The weather in the Muzkol is normally very stable, in 1997 it only rained once at base camp, and that was only for half an hour in two and a half weeks. In 1998 the weather was unusual with three days on which it rained for a few hours, and several days of partial cloud cover.

Tragedy in the Muzkol Pamir

Our fourth trip to the Muzkol sadly ended in a fatality. Ulf Carlsson, former chairman of the Mountain Club of Kenya, a very active mountaineer and one of our EWP representatives in Kenya was killed in an abseiling accident after an unsuccessful attempt on the north face of Zartosh (6106m unclimbed).

The trip had started quite well with one group walking across the Depshe Pass to view the world famous Lake Saryz whilst others explored access routes to the west summit of Soviet Officers Peak and the unclimbed Peak Frunze.

On the 23rd of July, after a 15km walk up the wild Bozbaital valley, Sasha Bolotov and Giles Cornah camped at about 4000m below Soviet Officers Peak. The next day they scrambled higher and finally carved out a ledge from the scree to bivouac at about 5200m before the steep upper sections of the mountain. On the 25th of July the pair started early and climbed steep ice couloirs for several pitches that led through a rock wall barrier to a glacier above. This led to the steep, frozen, and partly snow covered, scree and rock outcrops of the upper pyramid and hence the summit which they reached in the afternoon in poor weather. This was the first ascent of Soviet Officers Peak West (circa 6100m). The climb was graded Russian 5b.

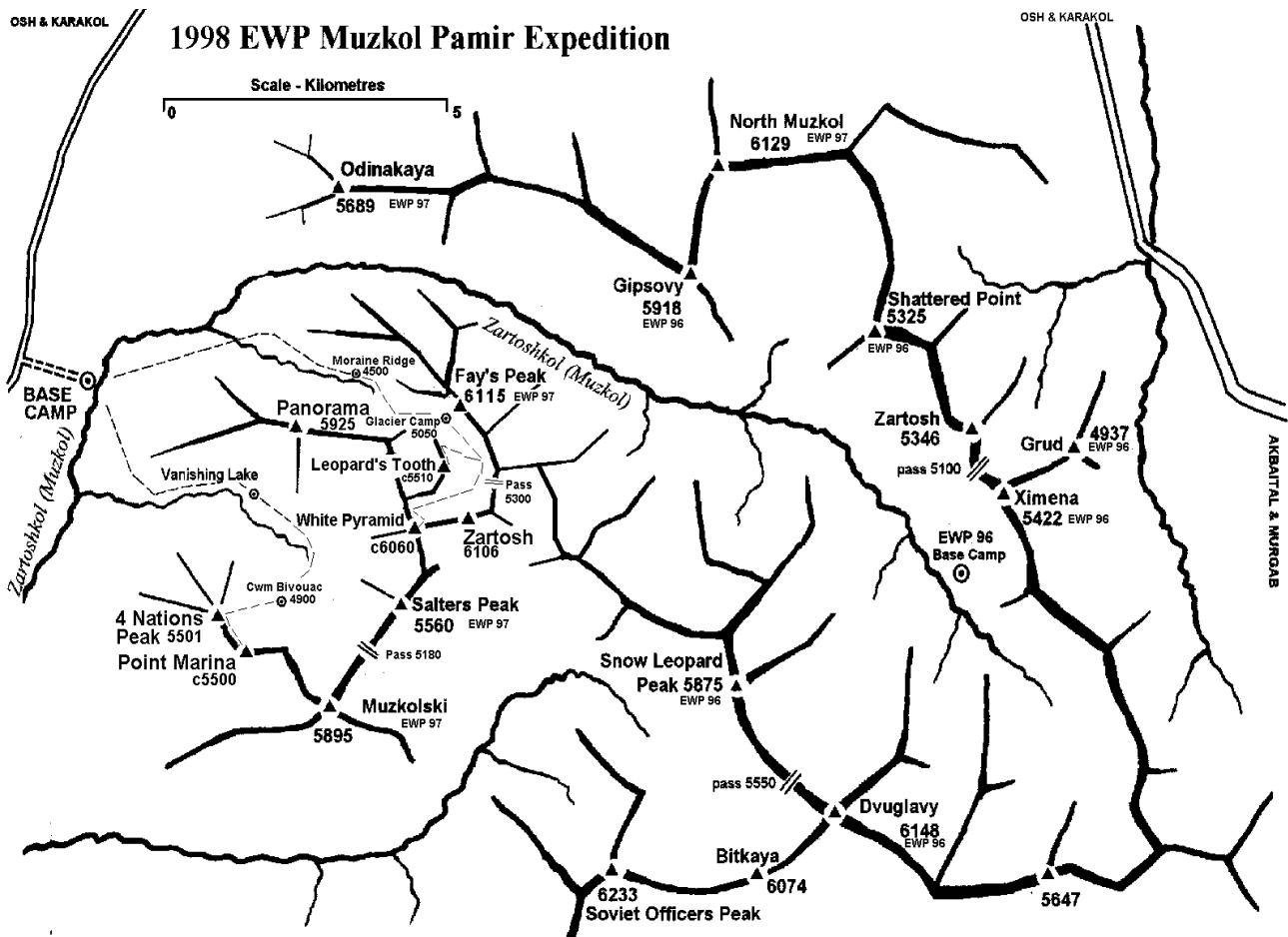
On the 26th July, in perfect weather, Malcolm Churches and Andrew Wielochowski made the first ascent of Peak Frunze. This turned out to be an uncomplicated ascent (Russian 3b) up easy snow / ice couloirs and then a snow ridge. On the same day Colin Sprange, Valery Rezhnik and Sergei Semiletkin climbed a minor point on the ridge of Frunze.

At this point base camp was transferred to the Zartoshkol Valley. Ulf, who had previously suffered from bad blisters after 40 km of walking in his brand new boots, went up to the Zartosh Glacier advance camp at 5100m. From here on the 30th July he soloed the central couloir of Fay's Peak (6116m). He discovered a plaque left by a Tadjik expedition in 1984. This discovery indicates that not all ascents in the Soviet era were adequately documented and reported in the Soviet mountaineering literature. The ascent was graded 3a.

On the 2nd of August, in rather mixed weather, Colin Sprange and Valery Rezhnik climbed Fay's Peak from the south up easy scree and snow slopes (Russian 3a). Giles Cornah and Ulf Carlsson set off on the same day to climb the beautiful, icy, north face of Zartosh. Rather poor weather delayed their start and slowed their ascent. 100m from the summit, at 8pm, they decided to turn back. At about 11pm, whilst abseiling, Ulf placed a piton which pulled out under his weight. He fell 500m and died instantly. In the morning Giles continued descending unroped and was met by a rescue party as he approached the bergschrund beneath the ice face.

Ulf was buried on moraines not far from the 5100m advanced camp on the Zartosh Glacier.

Appendix 4 – EWP sketch map



<http://aaj.americanalpineclub.org/climbs-and-expeditions/asia/tajikistan/2009-muzkol-range-zartosh-by-a-thomas/>

2009: Muzkol Range, Zartosh, by A. Thomas

(Back to: [Asia](#), [Tajikistan](#), Pamir)

Muzkol Range, Zartosh (6,128m).

By Adam Thomas, Alpine Club

In August, Jock Jeffrey, Graham Rowbotham, Simon Woods, and I arrived in the Muzkol Range. We wished to make the first ascent of Zartosh, a peak that had been attempted in the late 1990s and 2000 by commercial expeditions organized by EWP, a UK outfit. They had made three attempts via the northwest face from the col below neighboring White Pyramid and a fourth, in 1999, by the spectacular north face, which however ended in tragedy.



Viewed from north: (A) Zartosh, (B) White Pyramid, and (C) Leopard's Tooth. *Adam Thomas*



Jock Jeffery on east ridge of White Pyramid with northwest face of Zartosh behind. Route up Zartosh gained foreground col from left, then climbed obvious snow gully and steep mixed ground to gain summit ridge. Highest point is behind. *Graham Rowbotham*

A four-day drive from Dushanbe brought us to base camp at 3,870m. From there we spent the next week establishing a camp on the glacier at 5,100m, with an intermediate moraine camp at 4,500m. We also climbed Leopard's Tooth (5,470m), first named and summited in 1998 by an EWP expedition (AAJ 1999). The weather had been stable, although notorious Pamir winds picked up each afternoon and made base camp dusty and unpleasant. This changed on the night of August 16, and it snowed, albeit lightly, every night for the next week.

After carrying tents a little higher to the foot of Zartosh's 800m north face, Simon and I made an attempt on the 22nd. We reached a height of ca 5,650m on the face, before retreating due to unconsolidated snow on

technical terrain and the prospect of at least one bivouac in less than favorable conditions.

On the same day Jock and Graham set off to climb White Pyramid (6,060m), first summited in 1998 by an EWP expedition (AAJ 1999). Deep snow on the slopes leading to the Zartosh-White Pyramid col hampered progress, and Jock was battling to regulate his type-one diabetes, trying to decide whether his symptoms were due to altitude or blood sugar imbalance. After crossing a seemingly safe area of snow at the top of the slope, Graham suddenly felt a tug on the rope and, looking around, saw no sign of Jock, only the rope leading into a hole. A few moments later snow-caked sunglasses flew out of the



Looking across north face of Zartosh from approach slopes to col between Zartosh and White Pyramid. *Graham Rowbotham*

hole, and then Graham was able to gradually taking in rope as Jock hauled himself out. This proved the last straw for Jock, as the effort of extricating himself almost put him in a coma. However, Jock is a tough, determined bugger, and after a chocolate fix kicked in, only a little encouragement was required to get him up the final 100m ridge to the summit.

I was keen for another try at Zartosh, and although Graham was not overenthusiastic about slogging back up to the col, the summit of White Pyramid had proved a good vantage point for studying the northwest face of Zartosh, and he had seen a reasonable line. We stayed at high camp, while Jock and Simon went down to base.



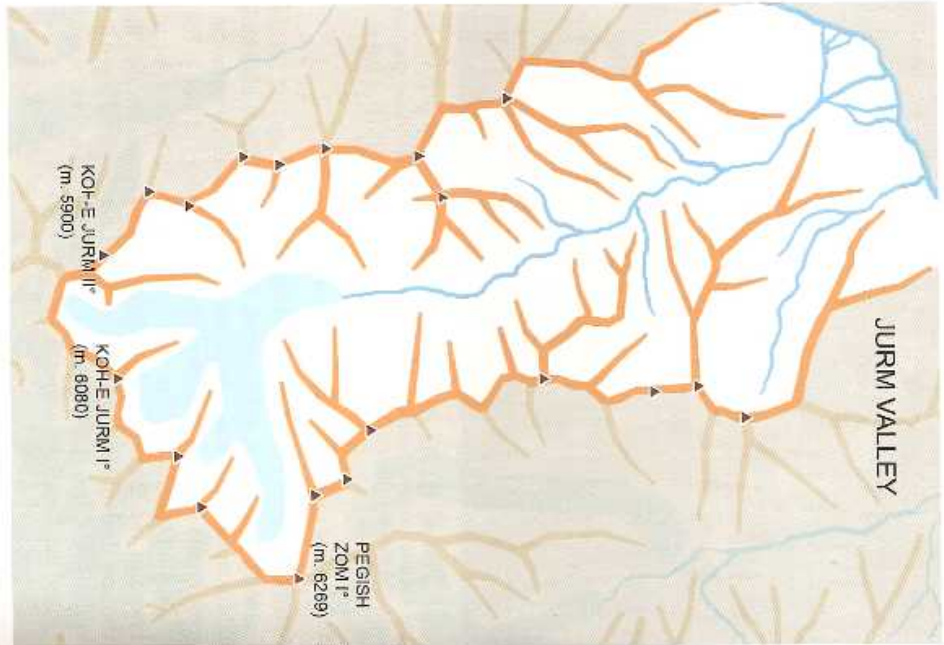
Graham Rowbotham climbing steep mixed ground on northwest face of Zartosh. *Adam Thomas*

At 5 a.m. on the 24th we set off for the col. Although the previous tracks had filled with spindrift, Graham was delighted to find the going much easier than it had been. Above the col the terrain became more challenging, and down jackets stayed on due to the shady aspect, wind, and a temperature of -12°C . Graham led a gully of loose powder and, above the first rocks, a section of precarious climbing on loose snow over ice. A snow/ice gully led to a steep and technical rock step. Above this, I took over and headed left over easy snow to the base of a steep rock band guarding the summit ridge. A groove that Graham had spotted from White Pyramid proved the key to overcoming this section, and also provided the route's crux. A few tricky moves gave access to a ramp leading to more broken, but easier-angled rock.

The summit ridge was a perfect knife-edge of snow, with huge cornices over the north face and broken rock and snow to the south. We short-rope a series of small steps and steep, unconsolidated snow, reaching the summit cornice in time for a late lunch and plenty of time to soak up the scenery. Descent was

by the same route, rappelling from Abalakovs and downclimbing.

On the return trip to Dushanbe, we took a more southerly route along the Wakhan Corridor, which provided magnificent views of peaks in the Hindu Kush. We thank the Mount Everest Foundation for its generous support.



THE JURM VALLEY

The Jurm valley is a lesser, short valley going down towards the Annu Darya. Ab -e Panj valley between the villages of Kashkando and Pegish. In its upper part, a modest glacier with its collecting basin opening like a fan, is dominated by a broad half-reach 6000 metres along the border with Chitral. Only two of them (orographic) left-hand side, and Pegish I (6269 metres) on the right-hand side. The latter was first climbed in 1968 from the Pakistani side by an Austrian expedition.

801 - Jurm I° was first climbed in 1969 by a Japanese expedition, apparently coming from the Pakistani side.

In 1972 an Italian expedition (Alpine Club, Padova) visited the valley and managed to climb five minor peaks between 5300 and 5600 metres altitude, without having to face serious difficulties.

802 - a,b,c. The following year another Italian group (Alpine Club, Bologna), led by Father Arturo Bergamaschi, went to the valley and repeated the ascents of Koh-e Jurm (6080 metres), Pegish Zoin I° (6269 metres), Koh-e Jamohoriat (5910 metres) and climbed seven minor virgin peaks between 5300 and 5500 metres. Several other peaks of the valley - all between 5400 and 5800 metres - have never been climbed or have been climbed from Chitral only.

Appendix 7 - Scan of 1972 Expedition Report

Note the discrepancies with reported altitudes and actual altitudes (the source of confusion over whether the summit was a first ascent)

1972 Italians

Jurm I and II. The Jurm valley was the last valley in this part of the Hindu Kush to be visited by climbing expeditions. The highest peaks, Jurm I and II, lie near Awal. The mountains climbed by the Italians from Padua mostly lay on the ridge between the Jurm and the Urgunt-e-Bala valleys. They approached through Faizabad, Barak, Zebak, Qasi Deh and Femandosi. Base Camp was in the Jurm valley at 13,950 feet. Despite much bad weather, they made the following first ascents: Koh-e-Past (Wala Peak 291a; 17,717 feet) on July 22 by Vittorio Lazzarino, Paoli Lion; Koh-e-Chard (Wala 288; 17,553 feet) on July 24 by Ugo Quintily, Lazzarino, Lion and Dr. Elide Veronese; Shal-e-Safid (Wala 286; 17,946 ⁵⁶⁹ feet) on July 27 by Alfredo Dal Santo, Quintily; Koh-e-Dur (Wala 281a; 18,111 feet) on July 29 by Lino Bortolami, expedition leader, and Dal Santo; Koh-e-Stara (the most difficult peak) (Wala 292, 18,176 feet) on August 1 by Bortolami, Lion; Koh-e-Jurm I (Wala 282; c. 19,685 feet*) ^{5999.78} and Koh-e-Jurm II (across the col from I and about 35 feet lower) on August 1 by Lazzarino, Dal Santo; and Koh-e-Sauze (Wala 291; 18,078 ⁵⁵⁷⁰ feet) on August 3 by all except Lazzarino. Lazzarino and the Afghan interpreter Bashir made the second ascent of Koh-e-Durang (Wala 289; 17,385 feet) on August 4.

5298

<http://www.himalayanclub.org/journal/expedition-jurm-1972/>

EXPEDITION JURM, 1972

authored by LINO BARTOLAMI | published in 1972-73

AT the beginning of September 1971 the lightly equipped expedition to Iran is on its way back to Italy. The members are talking about what they have seen, what they have done and what they may do later on. The idea of the Jurm expedition came into being during the hot days spent beneath the sun of the Asiatic steppes. As early as the following September and October of this same year, intensive researches were being made to choose the ideal objective. What the organizers were looking for, was a valley there they could find virgin mountains. The main purpose should not be a technical one, that is to find peaks whose conquest would represent a climbing victory; it was, rather, the wish to get in touch with a fresh mountain district different from our own. The "new" that in our country, how- very beautiful may be our valleys, however interesting for climbers of our mountains, no longer exists.

By 1972 we have got in touch with wellknown pioneers of the Hindu Kush, such as Adolf and Kurt Dimberger, but they knew nothing about the Afghan side of that long chain. We were able to get useful information from rock climber members of the "XXX October Club", who had just come back from a successful expedition to those districts: we spent a lovely evening with them and we got our first map on a scale suitable to our needs: a topographical document of the East Afghan Hindu Kush, patiently drawn by Polish climbers, the best experts on the range. On the same map the Poles had marked, for our friends from Trieste, the most interesting peaks probably still virgin. We chose at once one of the many valleys which seemed yet to be unexplored.

After this decision, we began to work to get the funds, to obtain the permits to enter the Wakhan district, to make a training program and to choose the most suitable equipment. All that was going to give us more trouble than we could have imagined: the permits were going to be held up for several months, the firms we applied to did not always seem willing to help us, equipment was going to be ready only in the last days before we set off. The "food-weight" problem was doubtless one of the hardest in our organizing job. It was solved by Ugo Quintily who did his best in this difficult task. The response to our appeal for funds was not as great as we had dared to hope, but, luckily, it was a different matter with foodstuffs, which we got free from several firms.

Photo Plates 21-24.

Another problem was finding suitable containers for foodstuffs and equipment: for foodstuffs, medicines and other fittings that could be ruined by heat we chose very light isothermal cases; for all the rest we used heavier, but very strong, plastic cases.

Our troubles were not over when, on 6 July, the group left for Rome: on our departure we had been informed that our luggage forwarded previously, had been left by mistake at Teheran. Here it was not possible to have the luggage sent by air because of the weight. In Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, we had our first contacts with the Italian Embassy that was going to be of great help with customs formalities, with permits, with the organisation of the journey by land, etc. It also got us an interpreter, an undergraduate knowing English who proved to be a very good fellow traveller. As the luggage was to arrive on the 12th, we decided that some of us would remain there, while the others would go and choose the camping ground and make reconnaissances.

On 9 July, therefore, four of us with the interpreter left Kabul; together with them left an expedition from Ascoli Piceno which was having similar difficulties to our own.

We set out for the North, passed through Kunduz and stopped at Khanabad. From here roads were not asphalted and we had to drive for 350 Km. among dust and stones, wading streams, along roads sloping towards impetuous rivers streaming down from the Hindu Kush. Besides, at Eaizabad, we met

other difficulties in obtaining petrol, food and fruit and because of the police blocks. At this point, we decided to take advantage of the little airport of Faizabad, which operates two weekly flights, and we booked tickets for all the members of the two expeditions for the return journey. We left our friends from Ascoli Piceno at Qadzi Deh at the entrance of the valley through which they were going to reach and climb the difficult and virgin M6; from here we reached Pegish, a little village of shepherds and farmers 2800 metres above sea-level.

We were now in the Valley of Abe Panja, a large sandy valley always vexed by strong continuous winds. It was the night of the 14th: the men of the village approached to offer themselves as porters. They were accustomed to the more and more frequent expeditions and they already knew what foreigners wanted when they come to their desolate country. In spite of our interpreter we could not agree to the rates of pay and we left the village to go and settle our camp at the entrance to the valley of Jurm known by the natives as a very cold and hostile place.

The next morning at seven o'clock the lorry made its way back; the interpreter with the driver had to go to Qadzi Deh to wait for our friends. An hour later the porters from Pegish reached our camp on foot or on horseback, and we succeeded in coming to an arrangement about the rate to be paid: we agreed upon 260 "Afghani" a day and an hour later we were ready to leave for the mountains we still could not see because the entrance to the valley is very narrow and meandering. It was nearly evening when we arrived at a large meadow, 3300 metres above sea-level, where a shepherd family spend the summer with their sheep and goats. We bought a lamb for our dinner; we meant to save our meagre supply of food until there was no alternative.

The next morning when the sun rose and warmed the valley, dyeing it red, we moved for the last leg of the journey. Now we could see our mountains: we became more and more excited. At about noon we began to pitch the first tent and we gave the porters the wages agreed upon: they were to go downhill to meet our friend Lino and Ugo and carry their luggage up to our camp. In the meantime we began to realize the beauty and splendour of our surroundings and the words most frequent in our conversation were "gorgeous, wonderful". All around us there was a sea of mountains from 5300 metres to 6000 metres, with their white peaks untouched by the hand of man, rising towards the intense blue sky typical of high mountain districts; we spent our time making plans and studying the mountains to estimate their difficulties and to find the easiest ways up.

It is the 16th: we are alone in the valley so long dreamed about and whose shape we had tried in vain to picture. The upper slopes are almost unexplored: a huge glacier covered with alluvial deposits and moraines, was the site we settled on for our main camp. From the evening of the 17th to the evening of the 18th, it has been snowing all the time. Our food is nearly gone. On the 19th we were really hungry and we have the last tin of meat with some soup. Our walkie-talkie is always working to send our angry or imploring messages to our friends carrying the cases. At last on the 20th, at eleven o'clock in the morning, we are all together. Our cases have arrived and for a good while we are busy opening them. Very soon everything is all right and we can start our climbing activities. We are going to have extraordinary experiences that will live for ever in our minds and souls. A serene living together, days spent living and working one for another. With us there are Baschir, the interpreter, and Arusbai, a young man, 18 years old: the latter will be a help carrying equipment and with work about the camp, and will be with us on the ascent of Kohe Sauze.

On the 21st, at five in the morning we wake up, but it is snowing. At about seven, the sky clears but there are still occasional falls of snow; at last the weather becomes good and we decide to leave. Vittorio and Paolo Lion leave with Arusbai, carrying only a little food, a tent and other equipment. Ugo, Lino Bortolami, Dede Veronese and Alfredo Dal Santo leave for the nearest peak. It is eleven o'clock and by noon they have reached the difficult part of the climb. At first we climb on rock alone, then on rock and ice. The difficulties do not exceed the four grade and the party enjoys the climb; but after four rope-lengths, the rocks become crumbly and dangerous. So we go round a ridge and up on to a slope composed of scree and snow. Unfortunately it is rather late: the top is 150 metres above us, but to reach it we have to cover a ridge 1 Km in length and we shall not be there before night. We go down back to our camp: two of us are not well either because of the strain at high altitude (we have climbed to 5,250 metres) or because of the days of fasting which had weakened us.

22 July, we rest at the main camp to recover our energies. The weather is wonderful, the sun is warm and we take the opportunity of washing ourselves. At half past one in the afternoon, Vittorio, Paolo and Arusbai come back and inform us that the first virgin peak has been scaled—Kohe Past, (Low Peak). To tell the truth it is a peak 5,400 metres high, and only because of the distance did it seem to be low and it has rock and snow difficulties. We must point out that the names we gave to the peaks are in the Afghan language and that we chose these names together with our interpreter and with Arusbai, according to the characteristics of the peaks. The first peak is called "Past" and it has been climbed by the North and North-West side; they did not encounter serious difficulties but it was a hard enterprise for the two climbers were out of form from lack of food.

On the 23rd, Lino and Alfredo leave for the upper camp pitched by the first climbers and the porter, among the crevasses. But when they reach the tent, because of the altitude and of the strain of carrying too heavy loads, they have headaches and they feel a general malaise. At half past two they come down and on the stony ground by the main camp they feel well again.

On Monday 24th, Ugo, Vittorio, Dede and Paolo leave early in the morning for a new peak. At half past twelve, they send a message by radio to inform us that they are on the top of Kohe Chard, (the "Four Climber" peak). They have not met with any remarkable difficulties. They take some photos of the C.A.I. and Italian flags planted at the top and then come down at full speed. We are in seventh heaven: two peaks, though they have no remarkable difficulties, have been reached. At night, all together in one tent, we sing in chorus: it is not perhaps a very good performance from an artistic point of view but the party is very merry.

The following day the four climbers rest at the camp, while Lino and Alfredo leave at three o'clock in the morning for the upper camp. From here, after a long rest, at two o'clock in the afternoon they attack Kohe Sauze, (Blue Peak). Unluckily, after four lengths of a rope on snow and ice, the bad weather forces them to return to the tent in a thick fall of sleet.

Wednesday, 26th: the people at the main camp wake up early. Their sleep has been troubled by the visit of a snow leopard who made the sleepers dream of bright eyes and white fangs. Lino and Alfredo come from the upper camp because they have judged a climb on the fresh snow too dangerous. The weather is always unsettled.

The 27th is, on the contrary, a wonderful day. Vittorio, Ugo and Alfredo leave for Kohe Shal-e-Safid, (the White Cloak Peak). With our binoculars we can see our weary friends at the top of the peak at one o'clock. This ascent has been affected from East to West and it was difficult only at the top because of some frozen snow. Wonderful top, from where you can see the Urgunte Bala Valley, parallel with the Jurm.

On the 28th we rest and recover our strength by eating substantial meals. The weather is getting worse, as usually happens in the afternoon. Lino and Alfredo resolve to leave the following morning to make a third attempt.

Saturday 29th; at half past three in the morning the two fellows, complaining about the cold as usual, leave for the upper camp. At eight, a message sent by radio informs us that they, are already in the direction of Kohe Dur, (the distant Peak). It is the farthest and the least visible from the main camp. The friends resting there can, nevertheless, follow the two climbers going up to the saddle to the South of the peak. In the meantime the weather gets bad, undoubtedly they are out of luck. When they turn to the North to cover the last ridge to the top, it is snowing and visibility is reduced to few metres; at a quarter past twelve the third peak is reached. The climbers are deeply touched but they have to hurry in taking pictures to come back quickly because the snow is worrying them. On the way down, in fact, they can hardly see their footprints, but at last they are in the tent where we end this happy day sleeping.

Sunday 30th: from the main camp Paolo, Dede, Ugo and Arusbai leave to carry down the upper camp. The following day, contrary to our plans, we are all resting at the camp because of a misunderstanding about the weather.

On August 1st everyday is awakened by the usual departure noise; four climbers are leaving. The party Lino-Paolo is going to attack the most difficult route climbed by the expedition. This route, from North to South-East, is partly on snow and partly on ice covered with soft snow. At the point of real attack the gradient is three or four in ten, but it increases towards the top. To reach it we have to traverse a wonderful snow corniced ridge where the going is made hard by deep snow covering ice. At about twelve, Kohe Stara, (the Star Peak) (5,540 metres) is climbed. We dedicate this stylish and difficult climb to Enzo Giuliano, one of our friends who died in the Dolomites. In the meantime, Vittorio and Alfredo have climbed jurm II (about 5,980 metres) through a route that was extremely hard because of the remarkable gradient and the deep snow. The route, going up from North to South-West, has gradients between 35° and 50°; only once did they need a piton and a rope stirrup made of lighter rope to overcome the upper side of a crevice. From the top, they climbed down towards the North as far as a wide saddle and then up the southern face to the higher peak, Jurm I, (about 6,000 metres) . It has not been the most difficult climb from a technical point of view, but the longest and the most tiring.

2 August: we rest at the main camp and we plan, for the following day, an ascent of Kohe Sauze (the Blue Peak). The weather is wonderful and all of us are going to take part. Unfortunately Vittorio is not well and his place is going to be taken by Arusbai, who clearly shows his happiness.

Thursday 3rd; we wake up at half past two in the morning; after a substantial breakfast we leave at about half past three. At four dawn begins to break while we are walking among the crevasses of the glacier between Kohe Sauze and Kohe Stara. After four hours' walk we attack the East face of Sauze, not difficult but rich in wonderful views of the Valley and of the faces of Stara. At ten Arusbai feels tired and sick. The sun is beating down on the snow and deflects an intense heat. We gave him something to eat and some pills for his headache, and we move letting him take first place on the rope. Difficulties are over and we are not far from the top; Arusbai can manage very well with an ice axe and crampons. When we are near the top he is overcome with enthusiasm and he quickens his step putting Alfredo to a severe test: he often has to make our Afghan friend slow down. At four o'clock Arusbai is at the top (5,510 metres) and is waiting for the others; his happiness can not be described and he shows it clearly with a dance on the snow. He is used to a very hard life, he has always had to fight just to survive in a poor and hostile land, but he understands the meaning of mountaineering. No values idealised and perhaps falsified by a too refined culture but an open soul makes this young man happy in his victory and questions such as "why" and words such as "selfishness" here have no meaning; they are only heavy burdens to climbers who place an importance on words.

We, however, are no less enthusiastic than he; all together we enjoy a two hours' rest in a spot without snow, among the rocks, lying in the warm sun under an intense blue sky high above us. Around us the Kotgaz glacier, the peaks we climbed, the valley of Jurm, the Pakistan and Russian chains: words can not describe all that. We close our eyes to be alone with ourselves and we remain in absolute silence. Our imagination can not go farther for that which surrounds us is too immense and incredible. Time has stopped still while, lying on the rocks, we feel the burning sunbeams on our skin. We are immersed in a perfect warmth that makes our living state perfectly balanced. But it is time to move, time to begin walking again. At three o'clock we are back on our tracks, unwillingly, but full of joy.

On the 4th Vittorio leaves with Baschir, who had shown the wish of climbing again, to attack a new peak. Lino and Ugo are going to work to get the cases ready for our return. Late in the afternoon the two climbers are back at the main camp; another peak, the ninth and last one, has been scaled; it is Kohe Durang (the "Two Colours" peak) (about 5300 metres). At about 4800 metres they encountered a vein of sulphur. They went along the South-west side of the mountain walking on rocks, scree and little snow with few difficulties.

5th August: at three in the morning the weather is bad; at ten it is fine but it is too late to move and vexed though we are to be unable to do anything, we take advantage of the moment by taking pictures of the group.

On the 6th Alfredo and Lino leave for the tenth peak, but, because of the bad weather, they are back at the main camp at half past eight.

We are now on the eve of our departure: our adventure is over, after twenty days spent together in the midst of wild nature. Everything is returning to reality while we are waiting for the porters. We know that they will try to get a payment extra to the fixed compensation, but we will avoid that difficulty by giving them the left over food and equipment.

On the 8th we leave:; the way down is fast, at two in the afternoon we reach the lower valley where the lorry is waiting to take us to Faizabad. The way back is not lacking in misfortune but we arrive in Kabul and we leave by air on the 17th. Flying towards Italy, we look out of the windows of the plane at the last images of Afghanistan.

Notes:

The "Jurm 72" expedition was fully successful both from a climbing point of view and from the point of view of exploration. It lasted in all 43 days: 24 in the operation zone, which include the days devoted to the approach. From Kabul to Faizabad it is better to travel by air to save time and danger, since the roads are sometimes very bad and to offset the defective organisation of the "Hertz" forwarding agency in Kabul. Besides that, travelling by air is no more expensive than by lorry.

At Faizabad Mr. Omar can easily be found and he is a very punctual driver good at carrying goods and people by light lorries, the best means of transport on those roads.

The cost of the expedition was 3,900,000 lire, 2,900,000 out of the members' own pockets. We had money contributions from: the "Club of Alpino" in Padua, the "Panathlon Club" in Padua, the "Cassa di Risparmio" of Padua and Rovigo and from a member of the "Club Alpino".

The following firms granted us a remarkable discount: "Me-nato Sport" on sport equipment, "Brixia" on heavy boots of the Rusconi type, "Munari" on light boots for the approaching walks, "Scantor" of Milano, "Unipack" of Bologna, "Plasmon", "Zuegg", "Fai" of Milano and "Siapa" of Rome.

In addition we were favoured with foodstuffs from other firms such as "Knorr", "Maschio", "Dietetici moderni", "Nestle", "Chiari" and "Forti".

The members of the expedition were six:

Miss Dede VERONESE

Mr. Paolo LION

Mr. Ugo QUINTILY

Mr. Lino BORTOLAMI, leader

Mr. Vittorio LAZZARINO

Mr. Alfredo DAL SANTO

As regards diet, it fell short of some of the items we are accustomed to such as Italian paste, cheese, salt meat, pickles, salad and vegetables. It was a mistake on our part not to take from Kabul potatoes and cucumbers, which were easy to obtain and which could have been kept for a long time. Mayonnaise, lemons, dried fruit would have been useful to vary our daily meals. We were short also of sweets.

At the camp it was very useful to have a very large tent where we could cook and stay all together in the evenings and when the weather was bad. We used gas-stoves and petrol-stoves: the former never gave any trouble while the latter were often out of use because of the not well refined petrol; a

necessary thing was a pressure-cooker. About clothes, the altitudes we reached did not require anything more than what is usual on high mountains, except some good equipment for the nights.

The scientific aims (besides the climbing one we have already written about) of our expedition were, first of all, to collect and classify the most representative samples of the flora of the Jurm Valley. The purpose of this research was to point out eventual analogies and differences between species of flora here in the Jurm Valley and those of our mountains; we were also interested in the adjustment of these species in different ecological environments. The Cartographic Institute in Kabul, with whom we have been in touch, was interested in our researches because maps of the flora of the Hindu Kush valley do not exist and they intend to have some made.

Therefore we collected, dried and catalogued in a herbarium (all this was done at the main camp) more than 50 specimens growing between 2,800 and 5,000 metres: 5,000 metres is the highest altitude where we found plants in the Jurm Valley. We took colour slides (about 90) of the specimens collected because it was not always easy to classify them at the camp. Colour slides were also taken of several woody plants or shrubs with the purpose of outlining better the plant kingdom situation in this valley considering the particular environment at this latitude and longitude.

The equipment for collecting was given to us by Padua University where we are completing the analysis and classification of specimens. Among the most remarkable results already reached is the great difference of altitude where some alpine species live. Plant structure is the same, the only difference (Plant Adjustment) is in their size. For example, the Grass-of-Parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*) lives on the Alps between 1,500 and 1,800 metres and here some specimens have been found at 3,600 metres. Some Compositae, Rosaceae, Labiateae, Primulaceae have been found at about 4,300 metres, while the last plant specimen, not yet classified, was found at 5,000 metres not far from the top of the "Two Colours." peak. At 4,250 metres some specimens of cryptogams have been collected.

Of the species collected we have also noted the common name given by the natives of the villages and the therapeutical properties that they attribute to some of them (An infusion of Primulaceae, known as Banafsh, in water should make a lotion good for eyes).

When classification is completed its results will be probably published in collaboration with some professors of Padua University which are interested in the research.

Besides, we also observed the rock type and conformation: we found metamorphic and sedimentary rocks including a remarkable quantity of Pyrites and mica, and rare crystals of quartz. Contrary to other valleys of Hindu Kush here granite does not exist. On one of the peaks we climbed, the Mountains of Two Colours, we found a vein of sulphur and consequently sulphurous water. To climb the nine peaks we explored the whole valley and we could therefore collect the data useful to revise the existing topographic maps (some of the mountains of the Jurm Valley are not marked on the map of Wala because this valley was observed only from its sidelong valleys and from other slopes).



JURM I (6,000 M.)



JURM II (5,980 M.)



KOHE STARA (5,540 M.)



KOHE SAUZ (5,510 M.)

<http://www.himalayanclub.org/journal/the-jurm-valley-mountaineering-expedition-1973/>

THE JURM VALLEY MOUNTAINEERING EXPEDITION, 1973

*authored by **DR. ARTURO BERGAMASCHI** | published in **1973-74***

THE Jurm valley, surrounded by a mountain range, bordered to the east by Pegish valley, to the west by Dr. e Urgente Bala, to the south by the wonderful Kotgaz Glacier, has been neglected by mountain expeditions for several years, and only in 1972 was reached for the first time by an Italian expedition, the "JURM 72" from Padua[1]. The reason for this may depend on the fact that it is a very small valley, about 20 kilometers long and 2 kilometers wide, and that it does not have big massifs. The opening of this valley, some ten kilometers from Kash- kandyo, at about 2,700 meters, is far from encouraging. The passage here gets narrower, so that a strong wind often blows raising the thick sand and causing real sand storms. It often looks more like Sahara Desert than Hindu Kush. Venturing through this valley, even the first few hours of march may become dramatic. The heat is almost infernal, one gets knee-deep in the sand, there is no water at all.

Only at 3,100 metres the situation changes completely, there is no more sand and to the south you can see, like a mirage, some wonderful mountains: Kohe Staza and charming Kohe Urgunt, 7,038 metres high.

The quick melting of the snow had increased the level of the streams, the water was muddy everywhere, even when emerging from the glaciers. In the cold weather the situation improved slightly. Only here and there we could find sources of pure water. We came across three from the beginning of the valley upto the Base Camp at 4,250 metres, (two days' march). We also passed two small villages, the second one inhabited by Mongols, at 3,850 metres.

Of all the mountains of this valley, only Pegish Zom I had been climbed until 1971: in 1968 from the south side, that is from Kotgaz Glacier, and in 1970 from Pegish valley.

When, in July 1972, the "Jurai '72" expedition from Padua was able to fix the Base Camp at 4,250 meters, they found the best conditions for getting excellent results. Special attention was given to the south part of the mountain range, where rises the highest Peak, Jurm, quoted 6,000 meters in the Linsbauer's map.

When I thought of organizing my third expedition, I turned my attention to the Hindu Kush, and close to Dr-i-Sar Sha- khawr[2] valley, on the suggestion of Dr. A. Diemberger, and — as an alternative — should any difficulties arise, the Jurm valley, which — from the report of the Padua expedition — showed some interesting aspects to be explored.

The expedition, which had the support of the Italian Alpine Club and of the Commune of Bologna, Italy, consisted of: Dr. Arturo Bergamaschi (leader), Dr. Achille Poluzzi, (medical doctor), Gilbert Bertolani, Gianni Calza, Benito Modoni, Alziro Molin, Guerrino Sacchin, Nando Stagni and Gan Carlo Zuffa.

The expedition left Bologna on 30 June, 1973, and reached Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan by plane on 1 July. We needed three days for going through the necessary procedures to get the visa for Wakhan corridor; then we reached the Shakhawr village by car in five days. The arrangements with the carriers were difficult from the beginning, notwithstanding the excellent efforts of our interpreter, Mohammad Qasem Ammadi. We went on discussing for several hours; the little old man that looked like the leader was irremovable: 4,000 lire per day and no horses, which had been formerly promised. We thought the price was too high and said we would get carriers from other valleys if they did not cut it. They answered all together that no man should set foot in their valley. We then decided to go to Pegish, hoping to find there more handy carriers. We were welcomed almost cheerfully, though the carriers definitely refused to go to Sar Shakhawr, while they were willing to go to the Jurm valley for 140 lire per kilogram. We were able to fix the Base Camp in the Jurm valley, at 4250 meters, on 12 July, in the same spot as the one used by "Jurm '72" expedition.

On 14 July we started our mountaineering activity. Molin, Stagni, Bertolani, and Zuffa attacking Pk. 293 A and scaled it at 2.00 p.m. Its name would be Kohe Chatral, 5500 meters. Meanwhile Poluzzi, Sacchin and Modoni reached White Coat Peak, Kohe Shal-e-Safid, 5450 meters (second ascent). was besl was the maj \ my kh< an wh son

On 16 July, Molin Poluzzi, Bergamaschi, Sacchin and Caiza attacked 293 B Peak, quoted 5320 meters and called Kohe Kha- nen, reaching it at about noon.

Very early on 17 July, Zuffa and Stagni left Camp I (at 4850 metres) aiming for Pk. 294 A. We consider this peak as district from Pk. 294, since it is separated from it by a saddle with an enormous crevasse, that proved impossible to cross this year. After going through Jurm Glacier and climbing two saddles, from 5200 to 5300 meters high, and along rocky ridge with "penitentes", they reached the peak at about 2-00 p.m. This peak was listed as 6080 meters.

On 21 July, two parties left Camp II, (at 5100 meters); Sacchin, Poluzzi, Bertolani and Bergamaschi, who tried to reach Pegish Zom I from a completely unexplored side, as first Italian climbers to it; while the other party, consisting of Zuffa and Calza, tried Pk. 295. Both parties succeeded in reaching their aim, and late in the evening they were back at Camp II. 295 Peak was listed as 5910 meters and was called Peak of the Republic — Kohe Jam- lioriat.

On 23 July, Stagni reached Kohe Shal-e-Safid (third ascent), and reached Pk. 286 A, Peak of the Peace — Kohe Solhtalab (5430 m.), and 286 B Peak, daughters of Joy Peak, Kohe Bachai Sohl Safid (5420 m.) — first ascent.

The last climbs took place on 25 July with the second ascent of Jurm I (6000 m.) and the first ascent of Pk. 287 A. Jurm was climbed by Modoni and Stagni, while Pk. 287 A was climbed by Poluzzi and Zuffa, who estimated it at 5450 meters and called it Peak of Liberty — Kohe Asadi.

On 2 August, we were again at Kabul.

These were the mountains climbed by us on the whole:

First ascents:

- 1) n. 286 A – Kohe Solhtalab, 5430 m.
- 2) n. 286 B – Kohe Bachai Sohl Safid, 5420 m.
- 3) n. 287 A – Kohe Asadi, 5450 m.
- 4) n. 293 A – Kohe Chatral, 5500 m.
- 5) n. 293 B – Kohe Khanen, 5320 m.
- 6) n. 294 A – Kohe Pegish Jurm, 6080 m.
- 7) n. 295 — Kohe Jamlioriat, 5910 m.

Second ascents:

- 8) n. 282 – Kohe Jurm I, 6000 m.
- 9)) n. 286 – Kohe Shal-e-Safid, 5450 m.

Third ascents:

- 10) n. 294 — Kohe Pegish Zom I, 6269 m. from an unex plored side.

11) n. 286 – Kohe Shal-e-Safid, 5450 m.

Note: We noted some difference of altitude between our measurements and the one given in the Linsbauer's map, for example, the Jurm I is 5800 m. high according to our records, while the Linsbauer's map states 6000 m. We could not check on Pegish Zom I altitude.

Conclusions: The Jurm valley, which can be rightly called the valley of the Italians, after the "City of Bologna" expedition, does not show special mountaineering problems. Still to be climbed are: Pk. 283 and Pk. 284 that form a very sharp crest frozen on the Jurm side and with persistent danger of rolling stones, and of very brittle rock in the Urgunt Bala side. Neither are interesting from a mountaineering point of view.

Pk. 293 is a small elevation, at approximately 5100 m. and of no interest. As to Pks. 302, 301, 300, 299, 298, 297 and 296. Only Pk. 296 of about 5900 m. and Pk. 297 may be of some interest. It is impossible, however, to climb them from the Jurm side because of the frightful falling of stones, while it is easy from the Pegish side covered with snow and free from this danger.

The rock of this valley is of met amorohic sedimentary constitution and contains a lot of pyrite, mica and rare crystals of quartz. Also a layer of sulphur was found. Unlike the other valleys of Hindu Kush, the Jurm valley has practically no trace of granite.

[1] See H. J., Vol, XXXII, 1972-73.

[2] Preferably spelt Shakhaur —Ed.