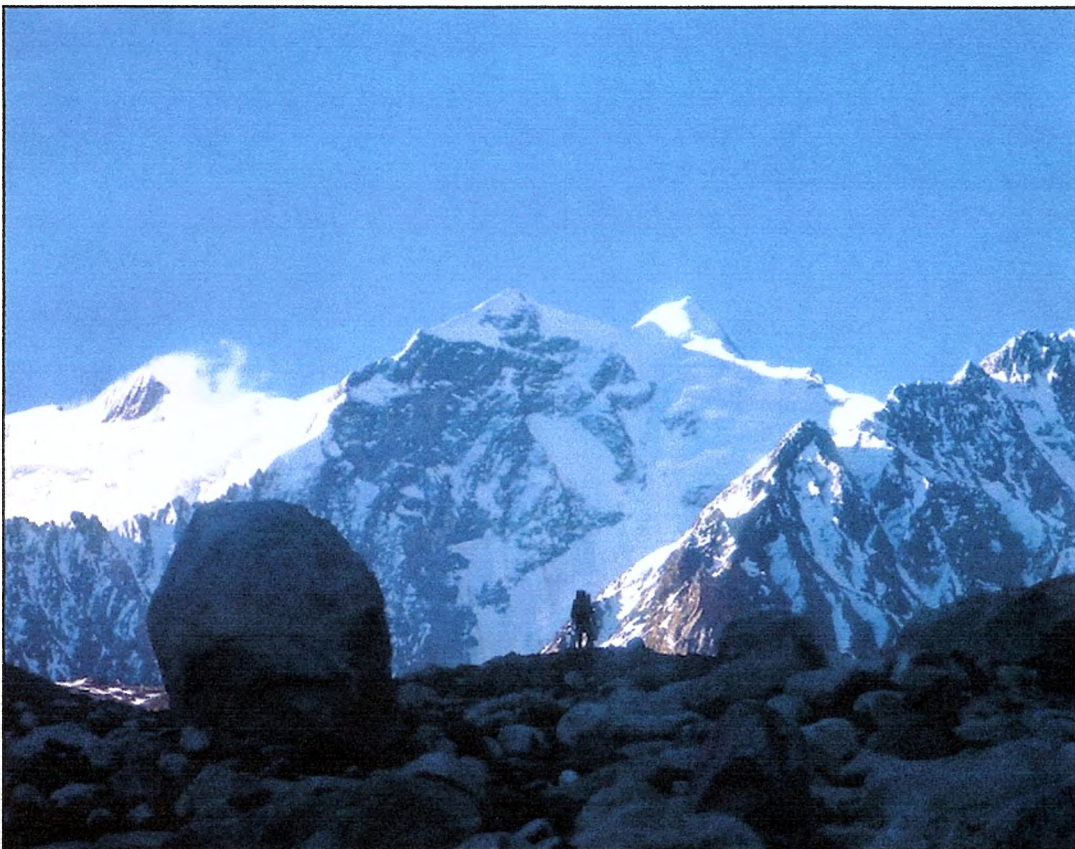


Scottish-South African Wakhan Expedition 2013



By Alan Halewood
Contact: alan@climbwhenyoureready.com



Expedition Report

Dates:

11 July 2013 to 8 August 2013

Members:

Alan Halewood. Age 41. British. Former officer in the Royal Navy. Full time Mountaineering instructor (MIC and IML) based in Fort William. 26 Expeditions covering every continent (both professional and recreational trips). First Ascents in Bolivia (Quimsa Cruz), Patagonia (Cordon Navarro Tierra Del fuego), Greenland (Milne Land and Gaase Land) and Mongolia. Previous trip to the region allowed reconnaissance of the approaches to the peak and 2 first ascents.

Richmond MacIntyre. Age 59 . South African. Consultant Engineer. Successful expeditions to every major peak on African Continent, Cho Oyu, Mt. Everest, Denali, Kosciuszco, Anconcagua, Mt. Vinson, Elbrus, 7 peaks (4 first accents) in Antarctica, First successful Ski Traverse of Liverpool Land Eastern Greenland.

Richard Parker. Age 41. British. Former Royal Marine. Rope Access worker (IRATA 3), Mountain Instructor (MIC and IML). 40 Alpine Routes to 20 major summits over 5 seasons. Mountaineering in the Polish Tatra, Jordan, Spitsbergen and Morrocco. 7 years in Glencoe Mountain Rescue Team.

Objectives:

First Ascent of 'Qara Jilga' (aka Kara Jeelga) the last unclimbed 6000m peak in the Wakhan Corridor and possibly in all of Afghanistan.

Summary:

After some last minute visa issues in London the team members met in Dushanbe to drive to Ishkashem and cross the Tajik/Afghan border. After 1 day in town we drove to Sarhad I Borghil the end of the driveable road. We engaged local Wakhi animal handlers and trekked to Kasch Goz. The Wakhi returned to Sarhad and we used Kirghiz animals to carry on up the Qara Jilga ('Black/Dark Valley'). After arranging a pickup date we moved equipment ad gear to a Base Camp below the north face of the peak. During descent from an acclimatisation route Richmond was hit by rockfall and received a head injury rendering him unconscious and unresponsive. We lowered him 300m down the route during which time he regained consciousness. After a day tending to his injury at BC we commenced 7 days of retreat back to Dushanbe. On return home medical examination has shown him to have no lasting injury.

Contents:

- 1. Objectives**
- 2. Summary**
- 3. Background to Area**
- 4. Visas and Permits**
- 5. Agents**
- 6. Expedition Diary**
- 7. Transport**
- 8. RM's Injury**
- 9. Notes on Insurance and Security**
- 10. Equipment**
- 11. Appendix 1 Finances**
- 12. Appendix 2 GPS Locations**
- 13. Appendix 3 Map**

Background to area:

Wakhan Corridor is commonly used as a synonym for Wakhan, an area of far north-eastern Afghanistan which forms a land link or "corridor" between Afghanistan and China. The Corridor is a long and slender panhandle or salient, roughly 140 miles (220 km) long and between 10 and 40 miles (16 and 64 km) wide. Wakhan Corridor separates Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province of Tajikistan in the north from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan in the south.

The corridor was a political creation of the Great Game. On the corridor's north side, agreements between Britain and Russia in 1873 and between Britain and Afghanistan in 1893 effectively split the historic area of Wakhan by making the Panj and Pamir Rivers the border between Afghanistan and the Russian Empire. On its south side, the Durand Line agreement of 1893 marked the boundary between British India and Afghanistan. This left a narrow strip of land as a buffer between the two empires, which became known as the Wakhan Corridor in the 20th century. The corridor has 12,000 inhabitants.

Mountaineering in the Region. In the 1960s and 1970s the area close to Ishkashem was popular with British, Polish and Italian expeditions. The mountains along the road to Sarhad e Borogil were relatively accessible and expeditions resulted in numerous routes and the ascent of most of the peaks over 6000m. Our Expedition focused on a Range several days walk beyond the end of the road at Sarhad.

Pamir i Wakhan Range

This range is bounded on the south by the border with Pakistan and the north by the Waghjir valley . To the northwest is the main Wakhan Darya and due west the Bai Qara valley.

This range offers a great number of mountaineering objectives including the unclimbed Qara Jeelga (6094m). With its 4 summits this is the only 6000m peak in the area entirely within Afghanistan.

Previous climbs:

- 1964 – German expedition lead by C.B. von Dobeneck climbed Kohe Baya Qara (5424 meters);
- 1974 – Polish expedition members: Ryszard Palczewski, Antoni Miklaszewski, Krzysztof Graczkowski, climbed Awal-Wakhjir Sar (5548 meters);
- 1999 – Japanese expedition lead by Akira Miyazawa climbed Sakar Sar (6272 meters), the highest summit of Pamir-i Wakhan;
- 2007 – probably German expedition lead by W. Heichel climbed Constanzia Sar (5902 meters).

Besides, two other summits in Pamir-i Wakhan have been climbed – Sakar Sar II (6250 meters) and Dehli Sang-i Sar (6225 meters).

- All the above mentioned ascents, but the two oldest ones (1964 i 1974) were climbed from the Pakistani side.

On an Expedition to the region in 2010 (supported by the MCoFS and MEF) Alan Halewood and Neal Gwynne were able to view the approach valley and most of the route onto the peak. During this time they made the first ascent of a satellite

peak which is probably the first peak in the interior of the range to have been climbed by westerners (although the peaks on the outskirts have been climbed previously in 1964 and 1974).

Visas and Permits:

Tajik visas and GBAO permits were obtained by post from the London Embassy by AH and RP. RM had a much more complicated job from South Africa. Afghan visas were obtained from The London Embassy using the services of Travcour by AH and RP (an interview in London is required but a proxy company can attend on the applicant's behalf) again it was more complex for RM but he eventually achieved the same via a contact at the Paris Embassy.

Agents:

Dima Melnichkov proved to be an excellent agent in Tajikistan. Transport was efficient, accommodation good, day to day service friendly and helpful, his English is excellent and he is obviously very experienced in dealing with Tajik Foreign Ministry bureaucracy. He even sourced 10x250ml screw on gas canisters for our jetboil.

Adab Shah Gawheri runs a large and efficient agency in Afghan Ishakshem. Whilst services are a lot more rustic than in Tajikistan his staff are extremely helpful, good English speakers are available and they will always try to help in any way possible.

Expedition Diary:

1. 11/7 RM AH Arr. Dushanbe. Shop in Green Market. Stay Hotel Khayon II (Wifi, Central, clean, efficient).
2. 12/7 RM AH Dushanbe
3. 13/7 RM AH day Trek Fann Mountains
4. 14/7 RM AH Dushanbe
5. 15/7 RP Arr Dushanbe. All 1 full day drive to Khala I Kum. O/n local homestay.
6. 16/7 1 full day drive to Ishkashem (Tajik side). O/N Hani's Guesthouse (good rural GH, English spoken).
7. 17/7 Cross border 9am. Meet Hamidallah local guide and Mohammed Atai (engaged as cook). Permits (3 passport photos needed) and food shopping. O/N Ayan Baik Guesthouse. Questionable kitchen hygiene.
8. 18/7 1 full day drive to near Khandud. O/n Zarik Guest House, adequate.
9. 19/7 1 full day drive to Sarhad- roads in a poor condition, difficult river crossings.
10. 20/7 Engage 2 horses and 4 donkeys, plus 6 Wakhi handlers. Trek to Daliz pass Approx 4200m. O/N Camp Showar.
11. 21/7 Trek to Zangkuk. Camp.
12. 22/7 Trek to east of Langar. Camp at River.
13. 23/7 Trek to Kasch Goz. O/N Guest yurt.
14. 24/7 Farewell to Wakhi horsemen. Engage 1 Kirghiz horseman through headman Haji Osman Khan with difficulty. Late start. O/n shores of river in Qara Jilga.

15. 25/7 Trek to within 1 hour of glacier snout. Horses, depart with guide and cook (after they make a load carry for us to glacier snout). 1 load ea. for all.
16. 26/7 Trek to Base Camp in NW coire of Koh I Qara Jilga.
17. 27/7 RP Recce acclimatisation route onto NW Ridge and pick up last load to take to BC. RM and AH round west side of peak to recce route in SW coire.
18. 28/7 All climb couloir (AD) to N ridge of min summit. 7 pitches into descent RM is hit by rockfall and is unresponsive to voice or pain. 5 lowers and abseils to glacier and he is able to walk to tent with assistance.
19. 29/7 Rest day. Clean RM's wound. Contact UK who speak to UK Embassy in Kabul (helpful in intent but practically unable to do anything). Extent of RM's injuries impossible for us to determine but knowledge of mechanism of injury, neck pain and altered vision cause us to decide to get him out ASAP.
20. 30/7 All descend to where horses dropped us off.
21. 31/7 Rest day for RM. Still altered vision although otherwise mobile.
22. 1/8 Horsemen persuaded to do a double stage back to Kasch Goz in 1 day. RM and RP ride some of day.
23. 2/8 1.5 normal stages. Trek out from Kasch Goz to between Langar and Zankuk.
24. 3/8 1.5 normal stages. Trek from camp to near Showar.
25. 4/8 Trek to Sarhad. Arrive to find road is washed out 60km away. Find a vehicle locally and drive to Kurut. Engage porters and rapid walk via a truck wrecked in the river providing a bridge to Sargaz.
26. 5/8 Drive to Ishkashem (double normal stage). O/n Ayan Baik Guest House.
27. 6/8 Cross border (Afghan customs officer is an odious man who pressurises all westerners to give him gifts). Ishkashem to Khal I Kum homestay.
28. 7/8 To Dushanbe. O/n Hotel Khayon 2.
29. 8/8 Early departure on altered flights from Dushanbe.

Transport.

Flights were booked with Opodo and Turkish Airlines. Both (especially the former) were quite flexible about changing dates after RM's accident.

Vehicle Tajikistan. To get to the border a good 4wd is preferable.

Vehicle Afghanistan. Roads are subject to change daily, often you are crossing or driving down rivers. 4WD essential but quality is very variable.

Wakhi horsemen. Uniformly excellent, helpful and timely. 1 Horse carries approx. 20kg. A spring balance purchased in Dushanbe would be very useful. A donkey carries 10kg. On the approach we used 2 horses and 4 donkeys.

Kirghiz horsemen. Uniformly unhelpful, late and with an opium addiction! On the approach from Kasch Goz we used 3 horses. On the way out from Kasch Goz we used 3 horses. Horsemen were persuaded to walk 1.5 normal stages per day but paid by the stage rather than the day (so we walked the 4 day approach in 3 days on the way out but paid the horsemen for 4 stages).

RM's injury.

After being struck by a rock approx. 25x25x15 cm (sharp edged) he was initially unresponsive to voice or pain and unconscious. After being lowered the first 60m he was conscious but confused. 240m of further lowers and he recovered insofar as he was no longer as confused and was able to walk with support. The next day his wound was cleaned with a savlon solution and he reported neck pain and altered vision in 1 eye but was mobile. After a day's rest he was able to trek with a light load.

With an unknown head prognosis but ongoing symptoms of possible internal damage the decision was taken to evacuate Richmond as soon as possible. This was only possible as a self rescue.

Subsequent medical attention has shown no lasting damage.

Notes on Insurance and Security.

The security situation in the Wakhan remained stable in 2013 however fighting has moved to within a couple of hours drive south of Ishkashem. East of the town the people are courteous, friendly and crime is almost unheard of.

Insurance is difficult to come by for trips to this area however an American company 'Global Rescue' provide Casevac services for a reasonable premium.

Equipment.

Camping. 4 season sleeping bags and thermarest type mats were used for sleeping on trek. Sleeping bag liners were handy lower down at guest houses. Stove. On this occasion Dima was able to source 10 screw on 250ml gas canisters @ \$10 each in Dushanbe for our jetboil. During the approach and retreat cooking was done by local staff on gas bottle stove with a pressure cooker.

Food. A large amount of luxuries (porridge, honey, jam, biscuits, sweets, salami) were bought in Dushanbe and transported in wooden boxes from the Green Market. Food in Afghanistan was very limited by comparison (tinned fish, poor quality biscuits, rice and fresh veg).

Clothing. Light trekking clothing day to day with warmer clothing for climbing at altitude including down/artificial belay jackets.

Climbing Equipment. The rock is uniformly shattered and loose but a limited rock rack (half a dozen wires and 3 cams) were used. 7 Ice screws were taken and used. 2 Snow stakes were used and abandoned as abseil anchors on the retreat from the couloir when RM was injured (other anchors were Abalakov V threads in the ice and 1 rock anchor at the top of the couloir).

Summary

The unfortunate accident prevented us from summiting any peaks on this trip and we were fortunate it was not more serious. As we knew before setting out expeditions to this area must be completely self reliant as no outside assistance is possible beyond Sarhad. The local Wakhi were excellent as ever and good at handling the frankly disinterested Kirghiz. On both occasions I've been here when returning to Sarhad it has been found that transport had not arrived as arranged owing to the road being washed out. Expeditions should allow extra days on the journey out accordingly.

Qara Jilga remains unclimbed for another year!

Alan Halewood Oct 2013.

Co-ordinates from GPS

Sargaz, 3036m, 04aug13	36°58'0.30"N	72°54'41.83"E
Rtn camp between Langar/Zangkuk, 02aug,	37° 0'27.03"N	73°41'57.83"E
Couloir crest, 5363m	36°58'20.60"N	74° 5'47.08"E
Couloir base, 5129m	36°58'19.99"N	74° 5'38.08"E
Back door approach to Qara Jeelga, 5100m	36°57'20.23"N	74° 4'12.58"E
Base camp, 4815m	36°59'1.97"N	74° 5'8.74"E
Moraine rest, 4702m,	36°59'17.16"N	74° 4'36.23"E
Cache 2 on glacier snout, 4552m,	36°59'45.24"N	74° 4'10.67"E
Cache1 glacier snout foot, 4434m,	36°59'57.48"N	74° 4'18.41"E
Black valley drop off by horsemen, 4236m,	37° 1'14.70"N	74° 4'0.19"E
Black valley 1, 3969m,	37° 4'41.27"N	73°59'8.45"E
Khash Goz, 4111m,	37° 6'53.82"N	73°56'35.95"E
'River' camp (East of Langar), 22jul, 3792m,	37° 2'35.56"N	73°50'27.74"E
Zangkuk, 22jul, 3476m,	37° 0'10.84"N	73°40'21.65"E
Showar, 3542m	36°59'51.22"N	73°33'52.67"E
Zarik guesthouse, 3262m,	37° 0'23.00"N	73°24'55.48"E
Qala e Panja, 2788m,	37° 0'18.61"N	72°34'28.45"E
Ishkashim, ayan baik guesthouse, 2638m	36°42'33.48"N	71°35'8.81"E
Kalai kum,	38°26'45.24"N	70°48'17.28"E
Top of pass on drive to border, 2090m,	38°57'50.11"N	68°42'55.01"E
Hotel Kayon, Dushanbe, 829m	38°34'3.14"N	68°47'28.03"E

Wakhan, 2013: Qoraeiega												14 August 2013											
Expedition base cost per member												Actual Cost of Expedition: Excluding airfares and Visa application costs											
\$1,827 \$1,582 Less: Expedition Grants \$3,860 Total group expedition cost \$2,967 Less: AHB & RBM only costs to IBHM only \$764 \$169 sub - total - expedition on site costs \$9,375												Expedition Grants Mountaineering Council of Scotland Mount Everest Foundation Alpine Club Mountain Club of South Africa											
Date	Activity	Transport	Accommodation			Food			Guide			Other			Contributions			Currency Exchange					
			AH & RBM	common	common	AH & RBM	common	common	AH & RBM	common	common	AH & RBM	common	common	AH	RBM	RP	Check: Somoni	Reconciles/Correctly	ATG / \$	\$/GBP	Rand / \$	
09-Jul	T Flight: Dep. GPT, 15:40			\$4,056																			
10-Jul	W flight: Arr. IST, 05:40																						
11-Jul	F Arc. DUS: 03:48																						
12-Jul	F Dushanbe,			\$45	Hotel Kayoon	\$120	\$49	\$93	\$93	\$49	\$1,000												
13-Jul	F Dushanbe,			\$50	Hotel Kayoon	\$120	\$49	\$93	\$93	\$49	\$1,000												
14-Jul	S Dushanbe,				Hotel Kayoon	\$120	\$45	\$60	\$45	\$100	\$130												
15-Jul	M pick up RP. Drive for border, overnight Katali Khum border.			\$550	House stay	\$120	\$60	\$60	\$60		\$90												
16-Jul	T Drive to border, Tajik side of border			\$677	Hotel's guest house		\$36	\$36	\$36		\$70												
17-Jul	T drive east, O'night: Qala e Panja,			\$40	Ayan Baik guest house		\$90	\$90	\$90		\$1,500												
18-Jul	F drive to Sarhad (roadhead).			\$469	Sahabulim's family guest hse		\$90	\$90	\$90		\$450												
19-Jul	F drive to Sarhad (roadhead).				Zang guest house		\$90	\$90	\$90		\$450												
20-Jul	S Start to Sower																						
21-Jul	S Sower to Zangak																						
22-Jul	M Zangak to Inver			\$322	Yurt		\$9	\$9	\$9														
23-Jul	M Zangak to Inver																						
24-Jul	F Inver to Zangak																						
25-Jul	F Inver to Zangak			\$241																			
26-Jul	F "drop-off" camp to Bala Camp																						
27-Jul	S BC, Recce south side and north colours																						
28-Jul	S climb couloir (rockfall)																						
29-Jul	M BC - rest																						
30-Jul	T BC to "drop-off" camp																						
31-Jul	W "drop-off" camp - rest																						
01-Aug	T "drop-off" camp to Kwash Goz			\$341	Yurt		\$9	\$9	\$9														
02-Aug	F Kwash Goz to Zangak/Langar																						
03-Aug	S Zangak/Langar to Sower			\$37																			
04-Aug	S Sower to Sarhad																						
05-Aug	M Sarhad to Sower			\$120	Garage guest house		\$75	\$75	\$75														
06-Aug	T Sarhad to Sower			\$10	Ayan Baik guest house		\$90	\$90	\$90														
06-Aug	T cross border to Tajikistan; drive to Katali Khum			\$119	House stay		\$60	\$60	\$60														
07-Aug	W drive to Dushanbe			\$348	Hotel Kayoon		\$20	\$20	\$20														
08-Aug	T flight: Dep. DUS: 05:40			\$172																			
09-Aug	F flight: Dep. IST, 00:55																						

