

Ogre North Face Expedition 2015

Greater Karakoram, Pakistan, June-July 2015



Mount Everest Foundation Expedition

(Expedition Reference 15/13)

Final Report

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1 Aim

The goal of the expedition was to summit the Ogre (7284m) by its unclimbed North Face.

2 Summary

The expedition was led by Bruce Normand (Scotland), climbing with Marcos Costa (Brazil). The other two members of the Ogre team were Jesse Mease and Billy Pearson (both USA). They shared logistics with Scott Adamson and Kyle Dempster (both USA), who were aiming to climb the North Face of the Ogre II (6960m) and the North Ridge of Latok I (7145m). The expedition spent one month on the upper Choktoi, largely in scorching weather which caused a significant increase in the usually nontrivial objective dangers of the Karakoram. The only summit reached was the acclimatisation peak of Baintha Ahrta (c. 6350m); routes without summits were climbed on Porter Peak, Biacherahi Central Tower, the Ogre to 6600m and the Ogre II to 6700m.

3 Introduction

3.1 Purpose

The Ogre is a contender for the most imposing mountain on the planet. Its first ascent, by Chris Bonington and Doug Scott in 1977, stands as one of the epics of climbing history. The British team climbed from the West and Southwest, and the Ogre has seen only two further ascents, by the imposing South Buttress in 2001 and from the East and Southeast in 2011. Thus the Eiger Nordwand of the Karakoram remains not only unclimbed, but also untouched by any recorded effort. The aim of the expedition was to climb this face.

3.2 Geography

A granitic spine cuts through the Karakoram range. From its southeastern end in the Kondus Valley, it rises through the peaks of the Charakusa Valley, including K6 and K7, and continues through Masherbrum to the famous walls of the Baltoro, Lobsang, Cathedral, Trango and Paiju. Beyond this it continues northwest to the peaks of the upper Panmah and on to the Choktoi, where it forms the Latok peaks (I-IV) and the Ogre I and II. Its western continuation includes the Solu peaks, Tahu Rutum and Pumari Chhish, while its southeastern continuation, if any, is unknown to climbers as it runs into the Line of Control contested between Pakistan and India. Of all these famous peaks, perhaps none are as impregnable as the Latoks and Ogres, particularly their northern aspects. Indeed, the North Ridge of Latok I is believed to have repelled some 40 expeditions since the first attempt in 1978, and no Choktoi expedition has ever reached a Latok or an Ogre summit, with the exception of the 2011 route (which avoided anything North-facing).

Global climate change is generally thought to be a bad thing. However, places with permanently terrible weather may rightfully see it as an opportunity, and this certainly seems to be the story of climbing in Patagonia in recent seasons. The Karakoram is not renowned for long and stable periods of summer weather, and certainly not for stable snow and serac conditions. It is possible that climbers viewing the North Face of the Ogre in previous decades were completely repelled by the serac bands in its lower, snowier

half. However, in the second decade of the 21st century they are no longer a definite show-stopper. Further, previous efforts to view the face seem to have been made from the upper arms of Snow Lake, which is a long and expensive trek up the Biafo Glacier to a glaciated base camp (BC). The increased traffic in the Choktoi has by now pioneered a 3.5-day trekking approach to a pleasant BC on terra firma, from which it is (for an acclimatised team) a 3-hour, technically trivial hike over the Sim La (5300m) to the base of the Ogre North Face.



Left: Latok III, I and II seen from ABC (c. 5500m) for Baintha Ahrta. Right: Sim La from the South, with Baintha Kabata (c. 6250m) and Baintha Ahrta (c. 6350m) behind. The Sim La crossing comes from the right and follows the inclined bench (max. 30^o) below the S Face of Baintha Kabata.

3.3 Access

The logistics of climbing in the Pakistani Karakoram have not changed for some decades. One approaches via Islamabad or across the Khunjerab Pass from China. Islamabad has not been unduly dangerous for the last 3 years, but the Karakoram Highway around Besham is to be avoided if at all possible. For the Choktoi, the road-head is Askole, which means a significant amount of paperwork in Skardu. Foreigners are (as a reaction to the Nanga Parbat shooting) supposed to be accompanied by an armed policeman at all times while in Skardu. The Askole road is in the usual poor condition, exacerbated in 2015 by mudslides and uncontrollable river flows from many side-valleys due to the unusually high temperatures. The last bridge over the Braldu was out of commission for vehicles after a partial collapse of the cables and hence the roadway; repairs were due for completion late this summer. Jeep drivers fortunate enough to have vehicles on the Askole side were charging 50% again of the usual fee (i.e. \$50) for the final 30 minutes of the journey. The trek from Askole branches North up the Panmah River from Jola (on the Baltoro trek), follows the Panmah Glacier for a day to its junction with the Choktoi, and finishes with a 5-7-hour day along the Choktoi to the “Ghafoor Camp.” The highest of the BC locations on the Choktoi, Ghafoor Camp is located on the North bank of the glacier, on solid ground at the foot of a spur and directly opposite the North Face of Latok I.

4 Team

Due to the expensive permit and liaison officer (LO) situation, the team preserved its alpine-style ethos by having three autonomous climbing pairs on one permit. The MEF-

supported expedition team members were Bruce Normand (Scotland) and Marcos Costa (Brazil). They were accompanied for the Ogre I by Jesse Mease and Billy Pearson (both USA). Sharing the same BC, and LO, were Scott Adamson and Kyle Dempster (both USA), who were aiming to climb the North Face of the Ogre II and the North Ridge of Latok I. The agency was Blue Sky Treks and Tours, whose owner, Ghulam Muhammad, had arranged all of the necessary (PAC and military) permits and paperwork. The sirdar and chief cook was Abdul Ghafoor, a long-time friend of US climbers going to the Choktoi, assisted by his son Basit.



From left to right, Jesse Mease, Billy Pearson and Marcos Costa.

5 Preparation

5.1 Conception

The idea of trying the N Face of the Ogre, and of approaching it from the Choktoi, were cooked up by Normand. They were tested on a trekking expedition in summer 2013, which revealed the project to be feasible both in general and, apparently, in its details.

5.2 Objective

The North Face of the Ogre features a complex sequence of rock buttresses atop a lower-angled snow slope with numerous seracs and Bergschrunds. A route was identified which weaves through the seracs on snow and ice to 6600m before taking a rock ramp to a snow field at 7100m and finishing steeply on the North and East sides of the summit block.

5.3 Permission

Permits for peaks in the Karakoram are granted by the Pakistan Alpine Club. Permits were obtained for the Ogre, Latok I (both \$1500) and Ogre II (\$900). It is also necessary to pay an “environmental fee” of \$68 per member per peak, although it is not at all clear



Ogre North Face from beneath.

that this money is put to any environmental purpose. Additional paperwork is required from the Pakistan Army to be allowed into the Baltoro region, and it is necessary to be accompanied at all times by an LO. The LO fee has not changed – a flat fee of \$1500, ostensibly for equipment, plus \$30 for every day in the city and \$15 for every day in the mountains. Rules for LOs introduced since the Nanga Parbat massacre include the requirement to be with the members at all times below BC and to carry a weapon. LOs remain, as ever, the least competent members of the armed services, to whom no other and more useful jobs could apparently be given. All of the necessary administrative services were performed by Blue Sky.

5.4 Logistics

Transport in Pakistan is slow but fees are largely fair and all are priced separately. Flights between Islamabad and Skardu remain the biggest bottleneck in terms of delays. Jeeps from Skardu to Askole are becoming generally less reliable due to road and bridge conditions and ever more frequent wash-outs. In 2015 all roads in the Northern Areas were subject to wash-outs caused by mudslides and melting ice dams.

Costa and Normand came overland from China and were able to bring most of their mountain food with them. Flying from the US, Mease and Pearson were able to do so too. Additional top-up items were all purchasable in Skardu. Canisters of quality gas are not available in any quantity and should be pre-ordered through the agency, which provides full BC equipment.

Climbing equipment consisted of standard half ropes (60m x 8mm), rock (nuts, cams, pitons) and ice (mostly short screws) racks, cord and a V-threader. No fixed rope was used. The two two-man teams each carried bivouac tents and Jetboil stoves, and one

satellite telephone (Iridium) was carried for emergencies, status updates and weather forecasts.

5.5 Medical

No vaccinations are required for Northern Pakistan. Normand coordinated a BC first-aid kit to avoid duplication and increase the range of treatments available to the members. Individual teams prepared their own climbing kits, with key antibiotics and painkillers sourced from the US. No members used any altitude medication.

5.6 Travel

Costa and Normand flew from Shanghai and Beijing to Kashgar, taking a vehicle in 1 day to Tashkurgan and then the bus to Sost, where they had arranged private transport to and from Attabad Lake, arriving in Karimabad the same evening. The US members flew to Islamabad; Pearson continued by bus to Gilgit and Karimabad to meet with Costa and Normand for some acclimatisation before proceeding overland to Skardu in one more day. Mease, arriving later, flew directly to Skardu.

5.7 Finances

Full financial details are presented in tabular form. Numbers are quoted in UK pounds (GBP) at the exchange rate of June and July 2015, 1.00GBP = 1.55USD. Numbers are quoted only for the two-man team of Costa and Normand, with shared costs indicated by “/3.”

Expenditures

Item	GBP
International travel	840
Domestic travel	320
Climbing equipment	160
Medical supplies	120
Peak fee	970
Environmental fees	260
LO salary and equipment	1800/3 = 600
Jeeps	450/3 = 150
Porters	4500/3 = 1500
BC staff	1500/3 = 500
BC equipment rental	1170/3 = 390
BC food and fuel	2160/3 = 720
Staff and porter insurance	180/3 = 60
Hotels	140
Mountain food and fuel	270
Meals	60
Insurance	320
Satellite Telephone	230

£7610

Income

Normand was the grateful recipient of additional grants from the BMC and AC.

Donor

GBP

Mount Everest Foundation

£1350

Rothschild Trust

£500

British Mountaineering Council

£900

Alpine Club

£400

£3150

The MEF and Rothschild Trust money was used against the two-man team's peak-fee and agency costs, while the BMC and AC money was restricted to Normand's expenses. Personal contributions from the two climbers were then £2880 from Costa and £1580 from Normand.

The author would like to thank all of the expedition's sponsors for their generous support.

6 Expedition Log

9th June

Costa and Normand fly to Kashgar and pick up shipped gear.

10th June

The pair continue by road to Tashkurgan.

11th June

The bus to Pakistan is cancelled on this date.

12th June

Costa and Normand take the bus to Sost, are met by a driver for transfer to Attabad Lake, take a regular passenger ferry and are transferred again to Karimabad, where they meet with Pearson.

13th June

The three climbers rent a jeep to Minapin village and hike up to Rakaposhi North BC, continuing across the Minapin Glacier and up south-facing slopes to make camp at dusk at 4000m.

14th June

Leaving at first light, the climbers ascend snow slopes and avalanche debris, enjoying excellent views of the North Face of Rakaposhi. Pearson begins to feel the altitude and turns at 5000m. Costa and Normand continue to the summit of Mirshikhar, 5445m, finding good conditions all the way. Views over the Hunza and up the Hispar are

shrouded by cumulus clouds over all the summits, but the weather is otherwise excellent. All three are back in their high camp by 2pm and hike back to Minapin, meeting their prearranged vehicle at 6pm and returning to Karimabad for dinner.



Left: Kongur (7719m) from the road between Kashgar and Tashkurgan. Right: Rakaposhi (7788m) from the North, on the summit of Mirshikhar.

15th June

The three climbers take a private vehicle to Skardu. The news is that Mease and the LO are stuck in Islamabad because all flights were cancelled.

16th June

Waiting begins in Skardu. Flights are cancelled again.

17th June

The three climbers rent a jeep from Skardu up the valley past Satpara Lake to the northern edge of the Deosai plateau at 4000m. From here they hike southeastwards over multiple rounded summits from 4000m to 4600m, enjoying excellent weather and expansive vistas. On return to Skardu, there is still no sign of Mease and the LO.



Left: Marcos Costa on the summit of Mirshikhar (5445m), with Diran (7266m) behind. Right: view over the Deosai Plateau.

18th June

Mease and the LO arrive around noon. The LO begins the administrative merry-go-round of looking for hyper-important senior officers whose signatures are essential but who are not in their offices at the hours when they undertake to be.

19th June

The same game continues. At 11am we supposedly have all the paperwork but a final handshake (or something) takes until 4pm, at which point there is no point in leaving for Askole. Our gear and BC equipment, however, leaves in the morning.

20th June

The jeep journey to Askole is uneventful. The portering and jeep process at the broken bridge is efficient. The LO does not like Askole and decides he will now return to Skardu to wait there for Adamson and Dempster to arrive in 8 days. The compound in Askole is filled with a Russell Brice team, shepherded by the man himself, with permits for K2 and Broad Peak. Of the 29 members, presumably 18 are paying the fee of \$55000 per head for full service while the other 11 are Nepalese.

21st June

The weather turns warm and the team leaves early for the trek, passing Jola by noon and arriving at the appointed riverbank camp with a trickle of clean water by 1pm. A long afternoon is spent sheltering from the sun. The porters are ably assisted by 4 small but strong Balti mountain horses.

22nd June

Another hot day of trekking takes the team to a pasture above the lower end of the Panmah Glacier and another hot afternoon is spent sheltering from the sun.



Left: Skamri (6745m) viewed from the Panmah Glacier. Right: granite peaks east of the Panmah.

23rd June

A very short day of trekking is required to reach the junction of the Panmah and Choktoi. This is the appointed final camp, where the porters make their preparations for a long day to BC and back the following day.

24th June

The weather turns poor, with low cloud hanging just above the glacier. New snow lies on the glacier beyond the cirque to Latok III, which opens out on the South side. Normand, wearing mountain boots, takes the lead through mixed snow, ice, mush and streams to try to help protect the porters' feet (all have hopelessly inadequate footwear). Inevitably, he falls waist-deep into a covered stream, but pushes on ahead anyway, bringing the team to the moraine on the North side of the glacier. Various team members take turns with Ghafoor to break trail and risk the big plunge into ice water. Finally the team reaches Ghafoor Camp as a blizzard begins in earnest. The mess tent is pitched, tea is brewed for

all the porters and their pay is handed out, while several of them disappear into the snow and reappear with the loads off the horses. The team sets to with tent-pitching, including the cook tent, and by late afternoon the camp is shipshape. Snow continues to drive in from up-glacier.

25th June

Heavy snow overnight buries camp and keeps some members awake trying to prevent tent collapse. An inactive day follows.

26th June

The snow continues intermittently. Members catch up with sleep and get ahead with reading.

27th June

No change, other than a clearing towards evening, which causes some members to go for a thrash on the glacier, where new snow is now waist-deep without snowshoes.



Views from Ghafoor Camp. Left: Latok I at sunset. Right: Ogre II at sunrise.

28th June

This break in the snow causes the members to succumb to an attack of irrationality. Packing overnight gear, they snowshoe up low-angle slopes to the northwest of BC, performing large amounts of work to reach a high point of approximately 5200m, just below the col to the upper Nobande Sobande Glacier. The snow has by now resumed.



Smaller peaks of the upper Choktoi. Left: in the background, Baintha Kabata (c. 6250m) and Baintha Ahrta (c. 6350m); in the foreground are the three Biacherahi towers. Ghafoor Camp is located at the foot of the spur in line with Baintha Ahrta. Right: peaks North of the Choktoi and downwards (East) from BC; at left is Porter Peak (c. 5700m).

29th June

Snow continues all night. Every slope ahead is now avalanche-threatened. The team packs up and returns to BC. Later in the descent, more persistent sunshine emerges.

30th June

The weather finally looks more settled and the great transformation from winter to summer begins. Avalanches are heard from all corners of the upper Choktoi.

1st July

The team saddles up and leaves for an acclimatisation climb. The easiest target is Baintha Ahrta (c. 6350m), soloed by Normand in 2013 by a snow and ice couloir cutting through its otherwise precipitous West Face. The approach involves hiking towards the Sim La and then cutting up a serac and avalanche slope to gain a high basin between Baintha Ahrta and Baintha Kabata (c. 6250m, climbed from the same place by Normand, Mease and others in 2013). The climbers get off the steeper slopes before the sun is on them and finish in baking heat to reach the 5500m high camp with excellent views of the Latoks.



Left: OGRE North Face from high on Baintha Ahrta. Right: final pitch on Baintha Ahrta.

2nd July

The four climbers solo the route. Costa leads the final ice pitch, which is in considerably more difficult condition than on Normand's solo. The snow on the crest is also deeper, but with a belay he is able to go to the true high point (which Normand missed by about 1m due to cornice danger). Normand and Pearson follow, while Mease turns back due to altitude. The trio enjoy excellent views and return to the high camp as the heat of the day kicks in.

3rd July

The climbers wake early and descend the hazardous slope as the sun rises over the Ogres and Latoks, making it back to camp before the day becomes too warm. With a view to the OGRE North Face, they cache all technical gear, stoves and tents at 5000m where the routes to Baintha Ahrta and the OGRE diverge. The weather forecast is for persistently good, if warm, weather, which the team decides is more important than an extra day's rest.

4th July

The climbers rise early, return to their gear cache and continue over the Sim La before the warmth of the day can turn the final (East-facing) slopes into an inclined swamp.

Arriving at the foot of the Ogre at 7am, they dig in to wait out another hot day. Pearson's lightweight tarp is the single most important item of team equipment.

5th July

A 3am start finds the snow around ABC incompletely frozen. The climbers find the primary Bergschrunds on the lower face to be little trouble to cross, solo ice and neve moves to 75°, and traverse rightwards beneath a rock band to enter the main climbing line at sunrise. Three roped pitches bring the two pairs (Costa/Normand and Mease/Pearson) over a short section of thin, dirty ice into a long couloir, which pushes the climbers onto a crest with potential seracs above. Mease moves right into the next gully, but suddenly finds himself in a firing range of flying rocks. Normand moves in beside him as some envisaged shelter turns out to be illusory, and Mease takes a number of hits. Pearson and Costa scurry across the gully to the far side, where Pearson helps Mease dig in. Costa continues to a natural hole, which he and Normand spend the next 2-3 hours turning into a real snow cave. All four climbers then move to the cave for more comfortable shelter. Rocks continue to fly down the main gully, and, astonishingly, a river is observed flowing down it from mid- to late afternoon (this is a North Face at 5900m). The team decision is unanimous: at midnight, when everything is hopefully frozen, they will descend.



Left: glacier camping in the heat. Centre: climbing the lower slopes of the Ogre North Face. Right: morning view of the Hispar Range.

6th July

The descent is inefficient but uneventful. Dawn finds the climbers soloing the lower slopes back to the camp. They pack everything up and head back to BC to reassess. The hike is stiflingly hot and soft, with extreme mush on the descent off the East side of the Sim La. BC is also hot, with ice beginning to appear on the glaciers as the previous week's snow vanishes. Adamson and Dempster have arrived with the LO.

7th July

Rest day. Warm.

8th July

Costa and Normand go for a pre-dawn hike to investigate the approach to the col between the two Ogres. They decide to stay away from the hazardous South-facing slopes on the eastern toe of the Ogre I, but find themselves soloing serac blocks and cut off by large crevasses invisible from below. The only route around the lower icefall is indeed on the mountain itself. They return to BC with the snow turning to mush at 7am. The weather forecast remains for more of the same, with daytime freezing levels soaring far above 6000m.

9th July

The climbers are anxious for more exercise. Costa and Mease go to Biacherahi Central Tower and repeat the route climbed by Mease and Karnoup in 2013. Again they are unable to see a logical continuation over the blank, red rock which makes up the final 100m to the summit. Normand and Pearson are attracted by the obvious couloirs on Porter Peak (c. 5700m, first known ascent by Magro and Wharton, 2009), which curve up its W Face and around to its northern side. The glaciated approach slopes are no problem and neither is the climbing. However, the final 50m turn out to be highly hazardous, with deep, soft snow over ice, and lead only to the underside of an unbroken cornice edge. The climbers retreat from here, perhaps 5-10m short of the foresummit but with very limited views. By now the air has become hazy in a way never before seen in the Karakoram, but familiar to climbers used to observing industrial pollution from the peaks of the Alps. The haze is thought to be coming from down-country Pakistan, where people are dying in 45^o heat-waves, rather than from the (to date unpolluted) deserts of western China.



Left: haze over the Latoks and Ogres. Right: mixed gullies on Porter Peak.

10th July

Rest day in BC. Hot.

11th July

Rest day in BC. Hot. Adamson and Dempster return from an acclimatisation run to Baintha Ahrta.

12th July

Hot. No break in the weather is visible anywhere in the forecast. The BC boulder, laboriously shovelled out of the snow by Costa in late June, gets a lot of attention.

13th July

BC. Hot. By now it is clear that the climbers will have to choose a target and a strategy to adapt to the heat, and go for one more roll of the dice. Normand and Pearson decide for another round with the Ogre North Face, climbing at night and snow-caving by day. Costa and Mease (understandably – he discovered on return home that one of the falling rocks had chipped a vertebra) were not interested and decided to tackle the Ogre II, by its NW Ridge from the col with the Ogre I. Adamson and Dempster declared themselves ready to tackle the N Face of the Ogre II.

14th July

The teams set out. Normand and Pearson repeated the easy day over to the base of the Ogre I and waited out the sunshine. The other two teams climbed past the lower icefall

and bivouacked again; Adamson and Dempster would take off from here but Dempster had stomach trouble and returned to BC the following night. Costa and Mease would have preferred to continue to the col but ran out of time as the morning sun caused stonefall on the upper 8 ice pitches.

15th July

Normand and Pearson, better acclimatised and moving faster than on the first attempt, left later to climb the lower slopes and arrived earlier at the snow cave, which required little digging out. A lazy day was had watching the sun go round on all the mountains to the West and North. Costa and Mease climbed to the Ogre I-II col and, finally free of objective danger, traversed to the western side and then regained the Ogre II NW Ridge by some highly enjoyable mixed climbing on excellent granite.

16th July

Leaving at 11pm, Normand and Pearson climbed across the main rockfall gully and completed 3 simul-climbing pitches to its left (led by Normand), then 4 up its centre past a rock band (led by Pearson). Normand retook the lead one pitch below the crux rock band, which was passed on a narrow streak of very thin ice, which led to a poor belay on execrable rock. At this point it was possible to cross the main couloir and continue up its left side on firm neve leading to deep, soft snow. Pearson tried to continue on the edge of the couloir but by this time the morning rockfall had started and he was stymied by soft snow. Normand took a different snow slope and was able to wallow up to a point under a serac at approximately 6400m where the climbers dug in for the day, sheltered from the falling rocks which were coming down on both sides of and over them. Costa and Mease continued up their route, finding more good but often delicate climbing, reaching a camp on a very precarious cornice at approximately 6500m.

17th July

Leaving at 2am, Normand and Pearson skirted the remaining seracs on soft snow and left a cache for the descent inside the last Bergschrund. They continued up and left on snow and neve, reaching the very highest point of the snow (6600m) a little before first light. Normand, leading and finding no protection in the rock, set a worthless anchor in the snow and ice and passed the lead to Pearson. In 1.5 hours of dangerous prospecting to the left and to the right, Pearson climbed up and down several body-lengths into the obvious rock ramp but was unable to find a single useful piece of protection, or of ice, and did find several axe- and footholds flying off down the snow slopes below. The black-orange rock band from 6600-7100m on this part of the Ogre, the feeder for the steady rain of rockfall down the lower slopes, is simply a slabby, friable, unprotectable choss of the highest order, and not at all like the immaculate granite of the south side. Perhaps it can be climbed on snow and ice in a different season, such as September (after the August rains and once the sun is no longer in the face) but under the circumstances, with 10 pitches of the same ahead of them, the climbers had to conclude that it was hopeless. They retreated to their cache and then to their serac shelter, arriving just on time to avoid the first major rock volleys of the day. The weather was by now featuring high clouds and ice-spicule rainbow rings around the sun, but even these later came to nothing.



Ogre North Face. Left: slabby choss at 6600m. Centre: Pearson prospecting for something climbable. Right: view out over Baintha Kabata, Baintha Ahrta and Bobisghir.

Costa and Mease pushed on above their camp, but found themselves facing a band of genuine rock climbing in the E1-2 range at 6700m, for which they were not at all equipped in terms of footwear or rock protection. They also decided on a retreat and returned to their cornice high camp.

18th July

Moving off at 11pm, Normand and Pearson downclimbed 2 pitches into the main rockfall gully and abseiled the whole thing on V-threads, arriving at dawn on a snow slope below a double-Bergschrund beneath the thin, dirty ice section. Traversing this slope was much easier than the icier, steeper ones above and the pair were soon back at the base of the face again. The morning clouds cleared obligingly to make the hike back to BC once again suffocatingly hot. By this time, rivers were flowing down North-facing slopes above 5000m, where avalanches were clearing gullies down to the ground.

Costa and Mease descended their route to the Ogre I-II col. A young Slovenian team had also arrived in BC and one pair was setting out on skis through the mush for some acclimatisation, ostensibly to climb a rock wall near the Nobande-Sobande col.

19th July

Costa and Mease finished their descent of the col and of the lower icefall, being forced to leave stuck ropes on the last abseil, and returned to BC by mid-morning. The Slovenians also returned, unsettled by the combination of the heat and the thickening clouds.

20th July

In persisting cloudier but warm weather, the team spent the day in BC wondering about Adamson and Dempster's progress. Alex Huber visited from down-glacier to report that his team had had a lucky escape on the Northeast Face of Latok III when the blast wave from a collapsing serac had nearly blown their tents off their platforms and into the abyss.

21st July

Adamson and Dempster were spotted returning to BC in mid-morning. Adamson was limping as a result of a suspected broken ankle sustained in taking a fall estimated at 30m when a piece of ice in which his axe was planted gave way. The pair had reached approximately 6400m after 2 nights of extreme mixed climbing and were entering what appeared to be an ice couloir of lower angle and leading out of the face. Adamson fell past Dempster and, it was later discovered, had chipped his elbow as well as fracturing his lower tibia. To add insult to this injury, the very last V-thread had given way as the two climbers were trying to cross the Bergschrund below their route, this then being

achieved very rapidly by the toboggan technique. Apart from a lost camera and bloody nose for Dempster, further damage was surprisingly limited. Mease and the LO lost no time with the satphone in accelerating the arrival of the porters to finish the expedition.

22nd July

Rest and packing day.

23rd July

The high-speed porters arrived in BC around noon. Gear was loaded, Adamson limped his way as far as a horse and the homeward journey commenced. The team reached the camp at the Choktoi/Panmah junction around nightfall.

24th July

An early start on a hot day was not enough to avoid some significant difficulties with river-crossings, but in the end these passed uneventfully. By mid-afternoon the group had reached the riverside camp above Jola. The LO began behaving irrationally, probably due to dehydration, and among other things tried to continue to Korophon, leaving his loaded weapon with Costa and Mease.

25th July

Another early start had the team back in Askole by 9am for a quick transfer to waiting jeeps. However, the bridge transfer was slow, and slowed further by a local festival blocking the road. By the time the jeeps had reached upper Shegar in mid-afternoon, the road was sliced by a raging torrent of mud and black water from a melting glacial dam high above. All traffic was cut for hours as the flow raged, but it began to dissipate towards nightfall. At this point some enterprising locals with planks were able to get pedestrian traffic, and loads, across for a fee. Blue Sky had by now sent another jeep and the journey finished in Skardu around 9pm.

26th July

As this was the only day in the coming week when PIA was flying to Islamabad with a large jet, the three Americans took their chance and disappeared immediately. Costa and Normand found themselves trapped in Skardu by more road-closing mudslides just to the West of town.

27th July

The promised open road took until 4pm to materialise. The advice of the locals was to take off immediately, in case another closure occurred. The promised vehicle was substituted for an old and uncomfortable jeep with failing headlights. After a long wait at the only bridge over the Indus, which allows only single-file traffic, one vehicle at a time, and had to clear a backlog of 3 days' traffic, the driver was able to crawl all the way to Karimabad by 8am the following day.

28th July

After breakfast and lunch at the Al Barakat hotel, Costa and Normand were transferred to Attabad Lake, did the scenic cruise one more time (the Chinese-built tunnel by-pass is now open) and ended the day in Sost. The news was that the Chinese-built road had been washed out above town and one could expect a delay of weeks until it could be repaired.

29th July

The bus company planned nonetheless to have a two-way shipment on this day, and all

the prospective passengers went through the motions of tickets, customs and passport checks. The break in the road was indeed only 30 minutes up from Sost, and involved the entire roadway plus foundations being washed away for approximately 100m. However, foot passage was easy and baggage was duly dragged across the break. The location meant a wait of 5 hours for the bus in the opposite direction, which then had to swap passengers and return to Tashkurgan. Night fell during the painstaking baggage searches by the Chinese military at the actual border and it was past midnight before the passengers escaped from the equally tedious checks by Chinese customs in Tashkurgan.

30th July

Costa and Normand got a morning vehicle transfer to Kashgar, arriving there around 3pm Xinjiang time, and apparently just before another road-closing landslide.

31st July

Both climbers flew out of Kashgar to end the expedition.

7 Conclusion

The expedition was unable to execute its declared aim of climbing the North Face of the Ogre. It encountered poor rock and extremely warm temperatures resulting in dangerous rockfall and climbing conditions. The new normal for alpinism in the Karakoram may be moving away from the summer months.

8 Acknowledgements

The expedition acknowledges with gratitude the generous assistance of the Mount Everest Foundation, the Rothschild Trust, the British Mountaineering Council and the Alpine Club.

Appendix A: Bibliography

The Choktoi Glacier has by now been chronicled in extensive accounts of failed attempts on its many target routes. The AAJ contains the most complete source of information.

Appendix B: Contact Information

Pakistan Alpine Club

The PAC (www.alpineclub.org.pk) may be contacted at info@alpineclub.org.pk

Agents for Expeditions in Pakistan

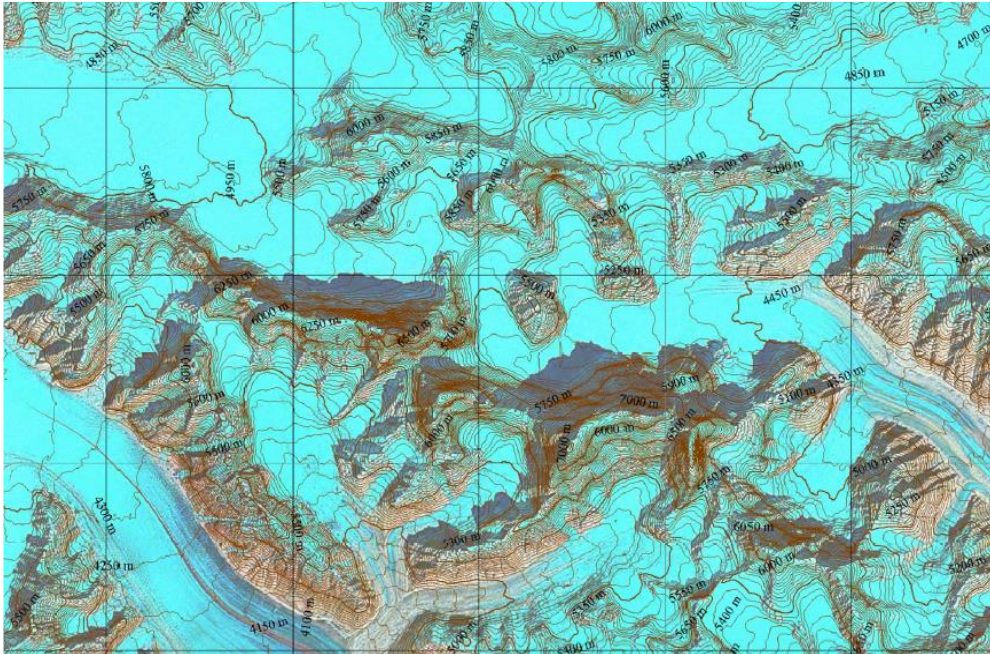
The author continues to recommend Adventure Tours Pakistan (www.atp.com.pk), who may be contacted at info@atp.com.pk

Expedition members' contact information

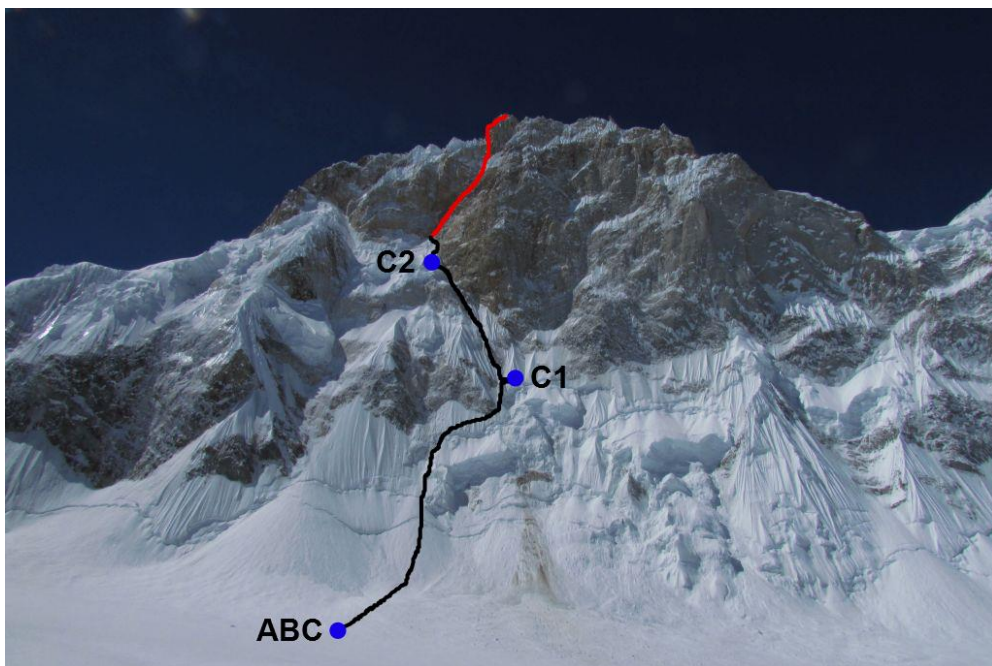
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Appendix C: Map and Route Diagram



Map of the Sim La region showing the Ogre (centre left) and Latoks (I and II, centre right) as the two objects casting large shadows. The Biafo Glacier is at lower left, the Sim Gang at upper left, the Nobande Sobande at upper right and the Choktoi at lower right. BC is located on the northern side of the upper Choktoi where the 4600m contour meets the narrow North-South rock spur. The Sim La is located NNE of the Ogre.



Ogre North Face from beneath. The first attempt reached the snow cave marked as C1. Black denotes the route completed on the second attempt (to c. 6600m), red the intended line to the summit (7284m). Reddish, black-streaked rock from 6600m to the upper snowfield (7100m) was slabby, friable and unprotectable.