

Gulmit Tower Expedition Final Report

MEF reference 16/14

Country and region visited: Pakistan, Hunza valley, Karakoram.

Objective

To make the first ascent of Gulmit Tower 5801m by the east face and southeast ridge, climbing alpine style.

Google Earth coordinates of main objective and base camp:

Base camp	36.385098	74.813843
Gulmit Tower	36.385975	74.781281

Google Earth coordinates of secondary objective:

Pregar	36.609876	75.030574
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Duration (from-to): 31st May 2016 to 1st July 2016

Summary of actual climbing

We abandoned our attempt on Gulmit Tower only reaching 4480m in the icefall because a) A major rock fall hit our base camp. One rock came through Pete's tent and hit him a glancing blow on the head. There was no other suitable site for base camp. b) We could not find a good route after two attempts through the chaotic icefall which was exposed to falling rock and ice. c) The couloirs on our two planned possible routes on Gulmit Tower appeared to be more exposed to avalanches and rock fall than anticipated.

We moved our base camp to the Moorkhun valley, which was not far away. We attempted the first ascent of Pregar 6112m (height from the Soviet map) by the south face. Our first attempt reached 5500m before we were stopped by crevasses. On our second attempt by a different line at alpine AD on the south face Pete reached within 20 metres of the summit but turned back due to dangerous snow conditions while Aiden waited in support at about 5700m.

Expedition Members

Pete Thompson, 56, British, English Teacher.

- 2015 First ascent of Harjoldur Sar 6104m, Karakoram, Pakistan.
- 2011 First ascent of Black Dog, 960m TD, United Arab Emirates. 2008-2011 Many new rock routes in the UAE.
- Routes in the Alps including Walker Spur, American Direct (Dru), Gervasutti Pillar (Tacul), north face Courtes (solo), north face Chardonnnet (solo), Frendo Spur.
- Expedition experience in Pakistan (10), India, Nepal, China.
- In Pakistan has climbed Diran 7266m and Batura 7785m alpine style.
- First ascents in Pakistan of Faroling Chhish 6178m (solo, TD), Mayon Chhish, Pute Tower III, Gutum Talji, Haigutum East and Ghorhil Sar. Attempted the first ascent of Beka Brakai Chhok solo.
- Ascents as guide of Muztagh Ata 7566m and Spantik 7027m.
- UK rock climbing to E2 and Scottish winter climbing.

Aiden Laffey, Irish, 42, Engineer.

- 2015 First ascent of Harjoldur Sar 6104m, Pakistan.
- 2005-2014 Many new single and multi-pitch rock routes in the UAE up to E3. Second ascent of Barun Wall 600m TD.
- 2013 Regular northwest face of Half Dome, Yosemite.
- 2011 Solo ascent of Ama Dablam 6812m, normal route. Climbed Lobuche East, Nepal.
- 2010 Second ascent of Mashnig, highest peak in Socotra, Yemen by a new rock route.
- More than twenty 4000m peaks in the Alps, many repeated. Solo ascents of the Matterhorn, Zinalrothorn and Mont Blanc via the standard routes.
- Many alpine rock climbs including the Cordier Pillar on the Grand Charmoiz, the Cassin Route on the Badile, the south face, Badile and the north face, Badile.
- UK rock climbing to E3 and Scottish winter climbing.

Budget

Expedition costs

International flights	£1000
Visas	£200
Insurance	£800
Domestic flights and transport	£500
Agency and accomodation	£550
Hill food and gas	£200
Peak fee and liaison officer	None
Food and stores	£400
Porters	£1000
Sat phone	£300
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	£4950

Expedition income

MEF grant	£2000
BMC grant	£1050
Alpine Club grant	£300
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	£3350

Balance-members contributions.

Permit

None was required as the peak is below 6500m in an open zone.

Previous attempts on Gulmit Tower

Gulmit is a village on the Karakoram Highway in Gojal in the upper Hunza valley. Rising west from Gulmit village is the Bulkish Yaz glacier, dominated at its head by a peak named Gulmit Tower. The peak is one of several summits on a long ridge running southeast from Ultar. Gulmit Tower has a prominence of 200m and is some distance from higher peaks. It can be seen from the Karakoram Highway and there have been five unsuccessful attempts on the peak.

Gulmit Tower was first attempted in September 1988. Frenchmen Gerard Decorps and Emmanuel Schmutz approached from the Bulkish Yaz glacier and climbed the couloir left of the peak on the east face to reach its south col at 5400m. Bad weather prevented further progress. A second attempt was made in July 1994. Julian Freeman-Attwood and Ed Webster, approaching up the Sikardu Glacier to the southwest, climbed a south-facing couloir to the west col (5500m). The rock on the 300m headwall of the west ridge above proved to be loose, and the pair retreated.

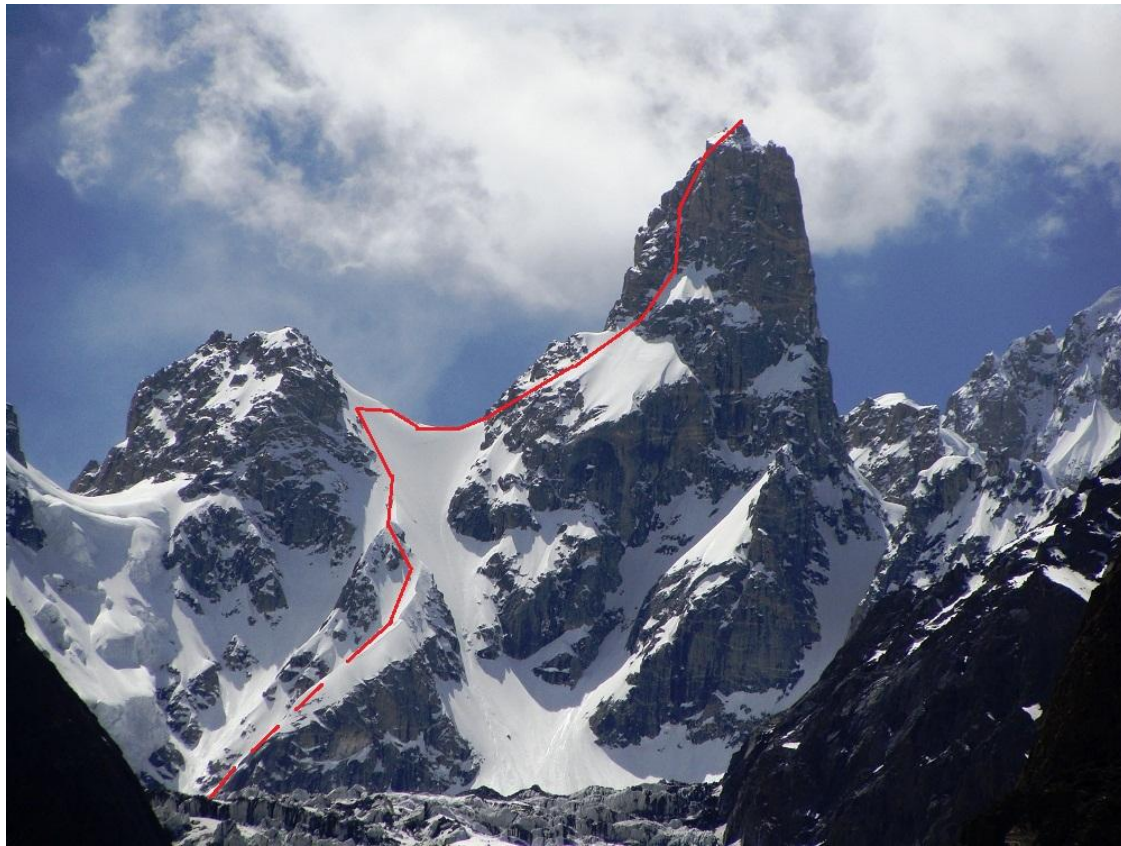
In September 2006 two Poles, Tadeusz Mazeno Dziegielewski and Jakub Hornowski, made the third attempt, following the route tried by the French. They climbed up the southeast ridge above the south col to the main headwall at 5650m but then retreated. Dziegielewski returned in July 2007 with Rafel Zarebski and two colleagues, but continuous bad weather and high avalanche risk prevented them climbing the couloir.

In 2008 Klaudiusz Duda and Slawomir Kawecki made the fifth attempt, from the Balkish Yaz valley. Wet snow avalanches were coming down the east couloir climbed so they climbed a line to the left to reach the south col. They retreated from 5650m at the headwall. Abseiling down the east couloir rather than their line of ascent they were hit by an avalanche but they escaped with minor injuries.

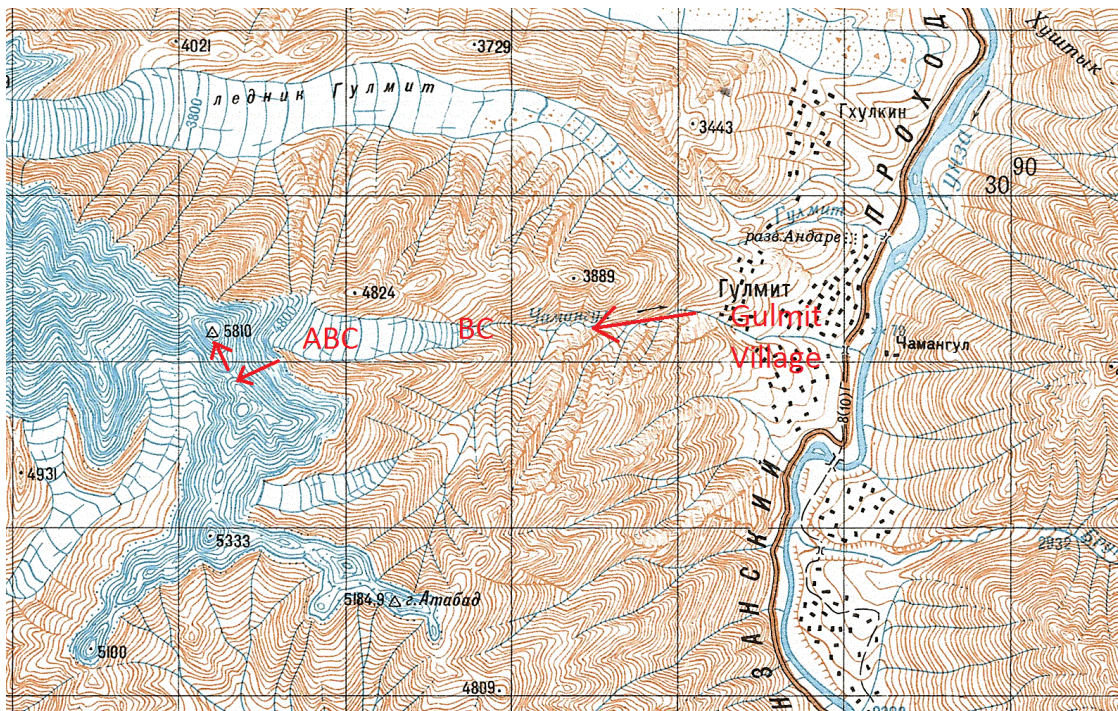
Our plan

Our plan was to find a way through the icefall above base camp and establish an advance base camp at around 4570m on the Bulkish glacier below Gulmit Tower. Our attempt was to be alpine style from ABC. In order to avoid avalanches in the east couloir we planned follow the route further left used by Duda and Kamecki to the col at 5400m and then join the southeast ridge.

A secondary plan was to climb the northeast ridge which was previously un-attempted. This has more rock climbing but possibly a safer approach.



Our planned route on Gulmit Tower follows the line climbed by the Poles in 2008, up the east face and southeast ridge as far as the headwall. This avoids the avalanche prone couloir to the right. Our secondary plan was to attempt the northeast ridge which is the skyline ridge on the right, to be approached by the couloir.



A part of a Soviet 1:100,000 map showing our approach to base camp, ABC and our planned route up Gulmit Tower.



The line of our first attempt on Pregar (left) and second attempt (right).

Diary

31 st May	Pete flew from Manchester to Islamabad (Aiden was delayed, to travel later). Met Adventure Tours Pakistan agent.
1 June	Shopping in Islamabad.
2 June	Flew from Islamabad to Gilgit, sending some luggage on the bus.
3 June	Drove with our helper and driver Mansoor to Aliabad in the Hunza valley for some more shopping, then on to Gulmit village.
4 June	Acclimatisation walk to 3200m beside the Gulmit glacier.
5 June	Walked to 3500m beside the Ghulkin glacier.
6 June	Walked to 3200m beside the Pasu glacier. Aiden arrived.
7, 8 June	Accimatisation walks with Aiden.
9 June	We took a tractor up through the village and started walking at 6.30am with seven porters. After a steep and difficult trek we reached base camp at 4100m at 6.15pm. The porters left.
10 June	We sorted out camp.
11 June	Rain. A big rock fall hit camp. The biggest rocks missed camp, but smaller ones came through camp. A rock came through Pete's tent and hit him on the head with a glancing blow, but did not cause serious injury beyond a small, deep cut. Unfortunately there was not another suitable camp site apart from much lower down, so we nervously stayed put.
12 June	Rain, stayed at base camp.
13 June	Tried to find a way through the icefall which was difficult and dangerous. Returned to base camp.
14 June	Continued to 4480m near the top of the icefall which gave us views of our proposed routes which did not look safe. Back at base camp we decided to abandon our attempt on Gulmit Tower due to potential dangers in the icefall, on the mountain and from rock fall at base camp. We called for some porters.
15 June	Our porters arrived and we returned to Gulmit.

16 June	Drove to Moorkhun village with Mansoor and arranged three porters for our trek to Pregar (6112m) base camp in the Moorkhun valley.
17 June	In Gulmit.
18 June	Drove to Moorkhun and left at 7.30am with three porters. We arrived at base camp at 4420m at 5.30pm and the porters left.
19 June	Walked to above the Karun pass at 5000m.
20 June	Carried gear to ABC bivi at 4920m below the south face of Pregar.
21 June	Rain and snow. At base camp.
22 June	Walked up to ABC.
23 June	We left at 3.30am and attempted the left hand couloir on the south face of Pregar. At the top of the couloir we entered a hidden valley but we were stopped by crevasses at 5500m. We returned to the bivi.
24 June	Made a recce further up the valley and found a better route on the south face of Pregar.
25 June	Moved our bivi to 5085m below the route.
26 June	We left at 3.00am. Aiden went the wrong way and ended up separated by large crevasses from me on the correct line. He waited at about 5700m while I continued up snow slopes up to 60 degrees. Towards the top the slope was sugary snow above hard ice and I gave up just 20m from the top afraid of falling off. It was unfortunate as it would have been easy enough with the rope which Aiden was carrying. I went down to join Aiden and we returned to the bivi.
27 June	Our food was nearly finished and we returned to base camp. Called for porters.
28 June	Walked back to Moorkhun with two porters and returned to Gulmit.
29 June	Drove to Gilgit.
30 June	Flew to Islamabad.
1 July	Flew to Manchester.

Acknowledgements

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