

## THE SCOTTISH KARAKORAM EXPEDITION 1985

### Members

Geoff Cohen  
Paul Nunn  
Clive Rowland  
Des Rubens

The expedition had as its objective the ascent of Gasherbrum III (7952 metres = 26090 feet) by a new route. Unfortunately we did not succeed in reaching the summit, but the greater part of the South-West ridge of the mountain was climbed, up to an altitude of about 7700 metres. This brief account summarises the expedition's activities for the benefit of agencies and firms that very kindly gave us their support.

### History

The Gasherbrum group of peaks lies at the Eastern end of the Baltoro glacier, near K2 and Broad Peak, in one of the greatest clusters of high mountains in the world. Although Gasherbrum I, II and IV have been popular mountaineering objectives for some years, Gasherbrum III has received much less attention. Part of the reason for this is the obsession with climbing 8000 metre peaks which is particularly prevalent in certain European countries. According to a list published in the Alpine Journal in 1984, our peak is the 15th highest in the world, and the highest mountain under 8000 metres, yet there had been only one expedition to it. In 1975 a Polish team of two women and two men succeeded in climbing the SE face from the saddle between Gasherbrum II and Gasherbrum III. Earlier, during the 1958 Italian expedition to Gasherbrum IV, Ricardo Cassin had made a solo reconnaissance of the North ridge of Gasherbrum III and pronounced it feasible. This was the route we had in mind, though in the event we attempted the SW ridge instead. As far as we knew no party since 1958 had climbed the dangerous icefall into the upper cirque between Gasherbrum III and Gasherbrum IV.

### Approach

We found the Pakistani tourist officials to be generally very helpful and efficient in easing our approach to the mountain. After a spectacular drive up the Karakoram Highway we reached Skardu on 27th June, and the roadhead at Dasso on 30th June. With the help of our Liaison Officer, Captain Naseer, 39 porters were engaged and we started walking on 1st July. Though it has become a well known trek we all found the walk up the Baltoro an unforgettable experience with endlessly varying views of rock spires and vast peaks. The weather was good, relations with our porters friendly, and all went smoothly. On 11th July we reached base camp on a bleak moraine between the Abruzzi glacier and the South Gasherbrum Glacier. There are fine views to Sia Kangri and the Conway Saddle in the East and Chogolisa to the South but only the summits of the Gasherbrums are visible above the first icefall of the South Gasherbrum glacier.

The number of other expeditions at this base camp was remarkable, with Americans, Swedes, Japanese, Italians and several French parties, some very large. Most were aiming for Gasherbrum II and some had commercial or filming objectives. There were French parties being guided up Gasherbrum II and film crews to record the first descents of that peak by hang-glider and parachute! The circus-like atmosphere, the rubbish left by other expeditions and the strains of a busy social life were not the sort of pressures we had been expecting; and the inspiring solitude of the high mountains was not to be ours till above Camp 1.

### Climbing

In the first week we stocked a camp half way up the first icefall and then moved up to the plateau above this icefall. The route was intricate but reasonably well marked by other expeditions. After a 24 hour snowstorm we established Camp 2 (6000m) at the foot of the S rib of Gasherbrum II, where a large amount of food abandoned by one of the big French expeditions proved useful. The new snow made the going slow for a few days but we started work on the second icefall between G III and G IV.

On 23rd July Des developed a tooth abscess and had to go down to base. Clive and Paul excavated an ice cave half way up the second icefall and explored a route almost to its top but decided that way was too dangerous. When Des had recovered we all moved up to the ice cave and on the 30th July we established a different route to the top of the icefall. There was a good deal of objective danger from falling ice blocks in this part of the climb. One 50m rope was fixed on a steep ice pitch. We then moved up to the high coire between G III and G IV and put a camp at about 6800m.

We reconnoitred the approach to the N ridge of G III but because of a steep step near the top we decided to attempt instead the SW ridge which, though very long and rocky, did not seem to be so steep and had the advantage of a shorter approach. We dug a second ice cave in the upper coire, but owing to strong winds we were unable to make an attempt at this time. Leaving a small amount of food and gas in the cave we retreated in very bad conditions on 3rd and 4th August.

The weather continued bad for five days with an enormous snowfall and unremitting low cloud. Luckily we reached base camp on the second day of the storm, while several parties who had been caught near the top of G II took five days to retreat.

On the 9th August Clive decided to return home, owing to business commitments, and our Liaison Officer and Cook accompanied him to Skardu. In spite of Clive's contracting a bad lung infection they reached Dasso in five days.

Des, Geoff and Paul went back up to 6000m on 10th August, though the fresh and as yet unconsolidated snow gave them a hard time. On 12th August Paul decided to go back down to base and the next day he left for home after trying to secure the tents at base camp and disposing of much rubbish from other expeditions. Meanwhile the remaining two of us carried on up the second icefall, having to remake the whole trail, and reached the top ice cave on the 13th. Next day we embarked on the SW ridge in spite of very strong winds. Fierce spindrift and unconsolidated snow over slabs on the S side of the ridge

made the going slow and we bivouacked at about 7400m on a very exposed patch of snow.

On the 15th, leaving the bivouac gear, we took just ropes and climbing equipment and set off with high hopes for the summit. The wind was still very strong but the climbing was fairly straightforward to start with. Unfortunately after about two hours the ridge narrowed and became prickled with gendarmes. After a further two hours of quite difficult solo climbing it became necessary to rope up. This slowed us down a lot and after a couple of pitches it became clear that we did not have sufficient time to reach the summit and return to our bivouac that day. The cloud had come in and with strong wind and spindrift it would have been reckless to contemplate a night out without sleeping bags. In retrospect it might have been wiser to carry our bivouac gear with us, though there were no decent ledges and obviously we would have gone more slowly. But in the situation it was the right decision, as subsequent events proved. The route we had chosen was unusual in having substantial difficulties near the summit, whereas many other routes on peaks of this altitude are rather easier in their upper sections.

The lack of visibility and the gendarmes made it hard to specify our high point exactly, but we reckoned we were two or three pitches from a horizontal snowy neck which lies beneath the final tower. Photos taken of Gasherbrum IV before the cloud came down suggest we were only 200 or 250 metres below the summit. But we were a fair way away horizontally with some difficult climbing remaining. In good weather it would probably have taken us another three or four hours to reach the top.

By the usual irony of such things the cloud began to lift not long after we started the descent, though the wind persisted. We reached the bivouac exhausted, with a little daylight left, and enjoyed wonderful views of Chogolisa, Masherbrum, Broad Peak, K2 and the distant peaks of Chinese Turkestan. We passed another wild night on our pathetic snow ledge and in the morning Des realised he was suffering from frostbite. We had a struggle to get his boots on and pack up in the violent wind, but once we had descended a little way we managed to do a series of abseils down the slightly more sheltered NW side of the ridge and reach the snow ramp which led down to our ice cave. The 17th and 18th were much better days, as the wind dropped : if we had only taken a rest day on the way up we would have been able to take advantage of this weather window!

On the 19th as we descended to base camp the weather became really bad again. To our astonishment our tent at Camp 1 had disappeared together with the accumulation of goodies we had been looking forward to. (It must have been taken by an Italian expedition, who were the only ones left when Paul departed, or by their porters.) Base camp was an unpleasant surprise too - it looked as if a tornado had hit it, though it was just the melting of the ice that had caused the tents to collapse. Des's toes were quite badly frostbitten and we spent the next few days tending to them while tidying up base camp and organising loads.

A major task was tidying up the huge amount of food and junk left by other expeditions. We could only deal with a small part of it. Burning food seems a criminal waste but we felt obliged to try and leave the place as tidy as we could. The less perishable items like tins were stacked in plastic drums and left on the moraine in the hope they might be used by future expeditions. Hygiene and litter disposal have become a big problem here in view of the

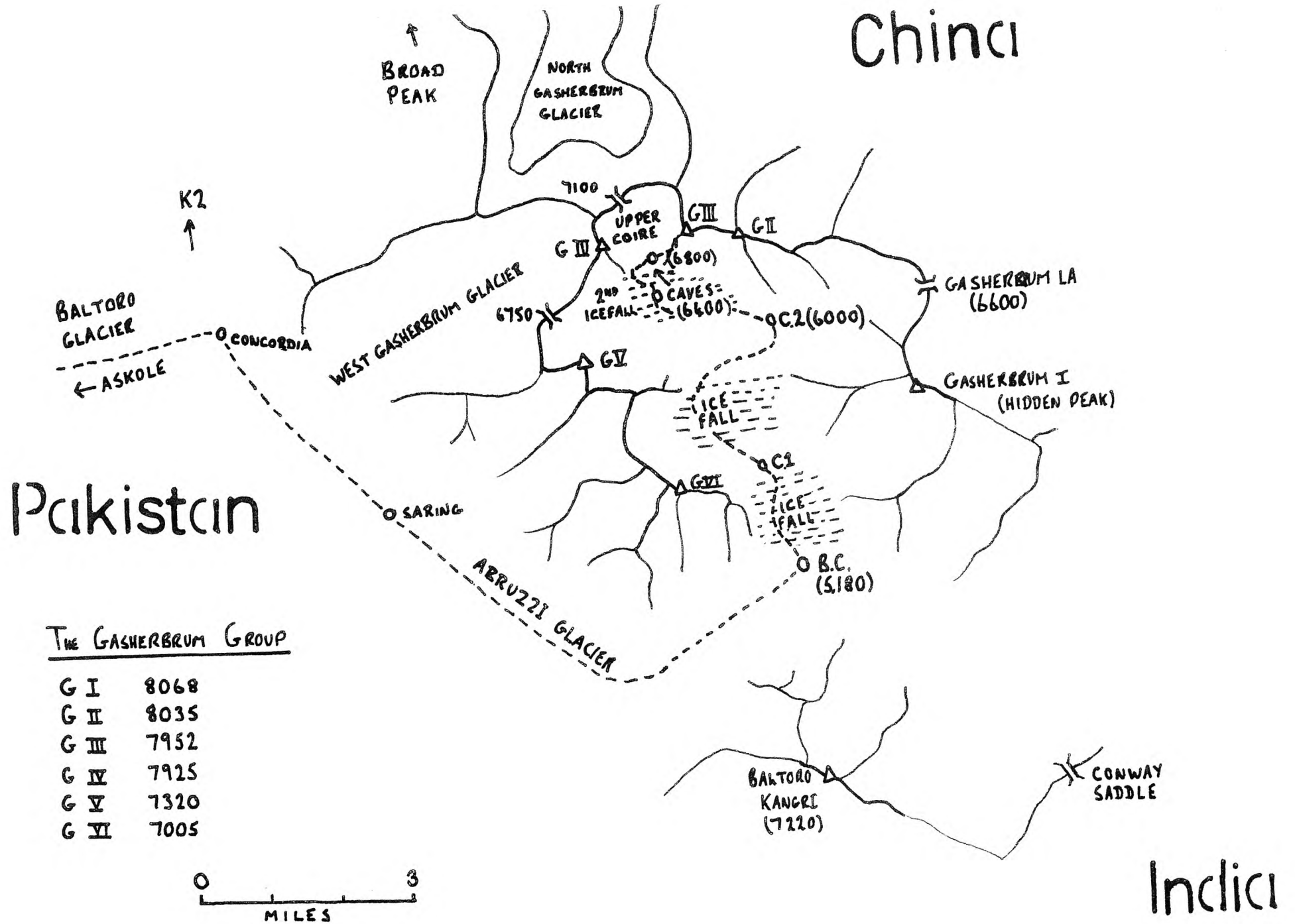
very large numbers visiting this base camp. Of course much can be thrown down crevasses where the movement of the glacier will eventually grind it up, though it may also surface later. Anything like a soup packet left on the surface is soon opened and scattered about by the ravens who have learned to live a fat life off the expedition camps at all altitudes. The long term solution must be a change of attitude - among the Western and Japanese visitors as much as among the Balti porters.

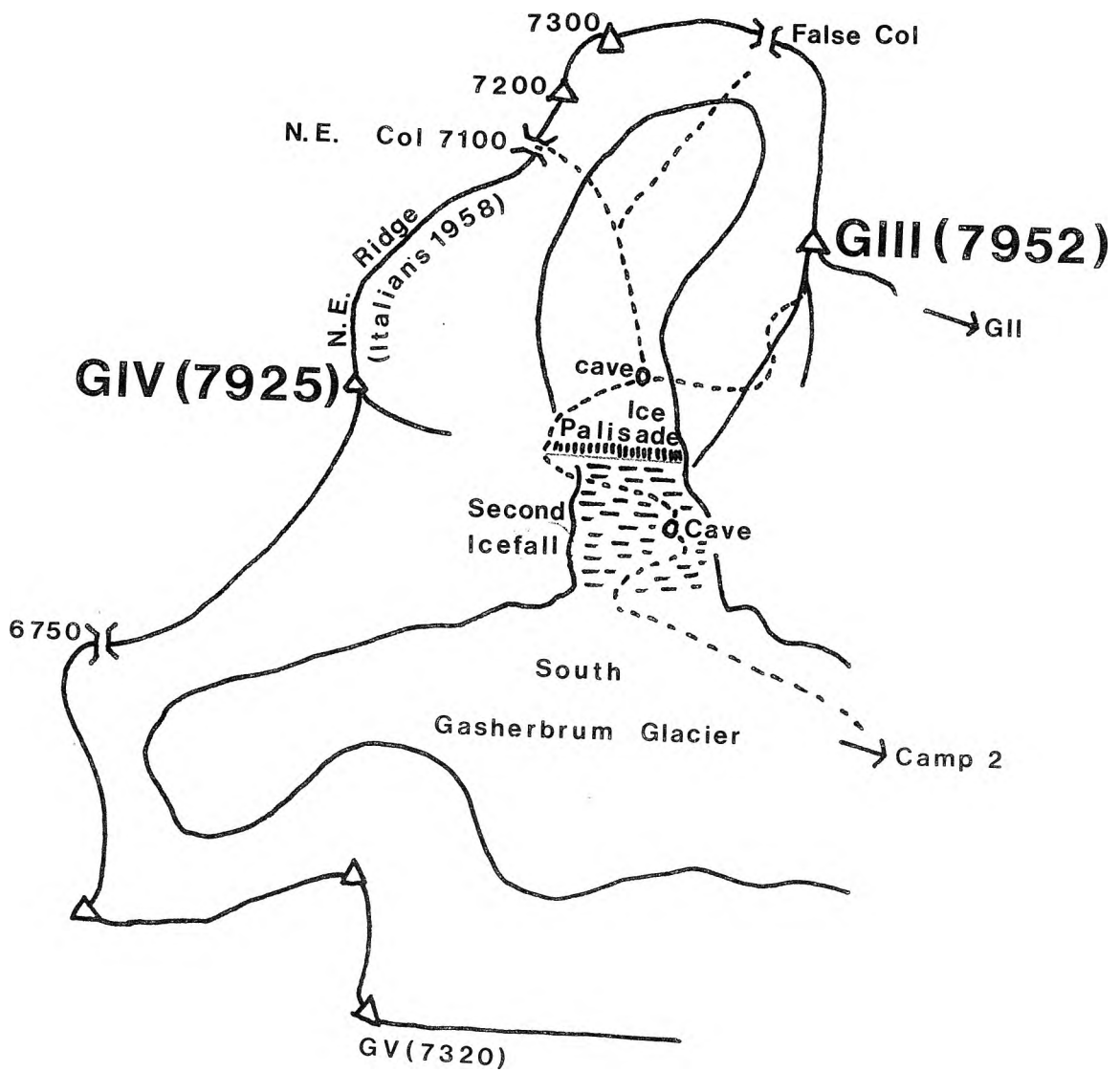
### Return

Nine porters accompanied us on the walk back to Dasso from the 23rd to 30th August. Des was in some pain and could only walk slowly, but with careful attention he managed to keep his feet free of infection in spite of the dusty and unhygienic conditions. On the 31st we reached Skardu where a British doctor from another trekking party very kindly dressed his feet and relieved our worries by telling us that he was unlikely to lose any toes. Des flew to Islamabad next day while Geoff manhandled 150kg of gear by bus and eventually on to PIA and home.

### Diary

June 22	Expedition flies London - Islamabad
June 26-27	Drive up Karakoram Highway to Skardu
July 1-11	Approach march from Dasso along Braldu gorge and Baltoro glacier to base camp.
July 12-27	Establish Camp 2 above first icefall (6000m) and begin route-finding on dangerous second icefall. First ice cave at 6400m established.
July 29-Aug 2	Complete route up second icefall and establish ice cave in upper coire at 6800m. Brief reconnaissance of upper coire including N ridge of G III and NE col of G IV.
August 3-8	Return to base camp. Continuous bad weather and heavy snowfall for five days.
August 9	Clive leaves for Skardu with Liaison Officer and Cook
August 12	Paul leaves from Camp 2 and decides to return home
August 13	Geoff and Des regain second ice cave in upper coire
August 14	Climb to bivouac on SW ridge at about 7400m. Strong winds.
August 15	Attempt on summit, leaving bivouac gear behind. Reach about 7700m by 1p.m. but ridge quite difficult and wind very strong. Lack of time enforces retreat.
August 16	Regain ice cave. Des suffers frostbite.
August 19	Geoff and Des return to base camp.
August 23-30	Walk out to Dasso
August 31	Reach Skardu
September 3	Des flies home
September 7	Geoff flies home





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The Scottish Mountaineering Trust  
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Mr. T. Rubens  
Mr. T. Weir

Donations of food and drink came from:

Batchelors Foods Ltd	(Soups and dried vegetables)
D.S. Crawfords Ltd	(Oatcakes)
Matthew Gloag & Son Ltd	(Famous Grouse Whisky)
Leisure Drinks Ltd	(Vegetarian pate)
Modern Health Products Ltd	(Vecon vegetable stock)
Quakers Ltd	(Sandwich spreads)
The Realeat Co. Ltd	(Vegeburgers)
Ringtons Ltd	(Tea)
Ski and Climb Ltd	(Fruit bars)
Sunwheel Foods Ltd	(Yoghurt bars and muesli at discount)
Thorntons Ltd	(Fudge)
Walkers Shortbread Ltd	(Oatcakes)
John West Ltd	(Sardines, Crab and Tuna fish)

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Ski and Climb Ltd	(Ski poles at discount)
Snowdon Mouldings	(Tents on loan, goretex and down clothing at discount)
Mountain Equipment	(Clothing)
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Farmitalia Carlo Erba Ltd	(Euhypnos)
Glaxo Laboratories Ltd	(Betnovate cream)
ICI Pharmaceuticals Division	(Savlon)
Leo Laboratories Ltd	(Fucidin)
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Dr. Mike Fried	
Dr. Charles Clarke	(Mountain Medicine Data Centre)
Nazir Sabir	
Shabbir Hussein	(Regional Tourist Office, Skardu)



Accounts

<u>INCOME</u>	£
Personal contributions (4×1900)	7600
Mount Everest Foundation	1000
Scottish Sports Council	750
Sang Award (Scottish Mountaineering Trust)	200
Mr. Martin Henderson	100
Mr. Theo Rubens	100
Mr. Tom Weir	50
Interest on deposit a/c	<u>72.14</u>
	<u>£9872.14</u>
 <u>EXPENDITURE</u>	
Flights to Islamabad	1980
Peak fee	813
Freight charges	out 373 back 135
Customs handling charges	out 50 back 43
	601
Insurance	members 368 LO & porters 177
	545
Travel in Pakistan	
Islamabad-Skardu	157
Skardu -Dasso	71
Dasso -Skardu	64
Skardu-Islamabad	90
	382
Porters' wages	to BC 1865 from BC 600
	2465
Cook's wages	181
Liaison Officer's food	157
Equipment for LO and Cook	325
Communal food, cooking equipment etc (from UK)	446
Medical supplies from UK	75
Travel in UK (interview, collecting equipment etc)	96
Administration in UK (postage, leaflets, report etc)	150
Loss on exchange rate for Pakistan Govt. bond	143.5
Bank charges for traveller's cheques	54.5
Expenses in Skardu (K2 Motel, food purchases)	625
Expenses in Islamabad (food, taxis, cooking equipment)	<u>800</u>
	<u>£9839</u>
	Total

# THE KARAKORAM RANGE

