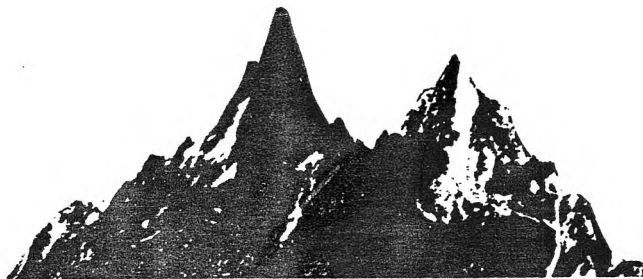


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# CHARAKUSA SPIRES EXPEDITION 1988

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## REPORT

### MEMBERS:

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### OBJECT:

TO EXPLORE AND CLIMB IN THE AREAS SURROUNDING THE  
CHARAKUSA GLACIER, HUSHE VALLEY REGION, IN THE PAKISTAN  
KARAKORAM. SPECIFICALLY THOSE OBJECTIVES NOTED BY THE  
1987 BRITISH SOUTH EAST KARAKORAM EXPEDITION.

TO CLIMB ONE OR MORE OF THE SPECTACULAR GRANITE SPIRES  
LOCATED AT THE EASTERN END OF THE CHARAKUSA GLACIER.  
AND POSSIBLY ALSO TO ATTEMPT A SUB 6000 METRE SNOW/ICE  
PEAK.

+  
623

289

### INTRODUCTION:

Our expedition was born from the British South East Karakoram Expedition of last year. Whilst in Pakistan on that trip, weather and injury, combined with first time lessons, left Dave Hamilton with an itch to return, and it was around him that the trip evolved. Consequently, as no-one else on the trip had been to the Karakoram, we relied heavily upon Dave's experience which inevitably meant his work load was the heavier.

As was stated in last years report,

"The concept of small groups of climbers attempting smaller peaks in the Himalaya and Karakoram ranges using alpine techniques is not new. However, the easing of restrictions and improving of transport links has opened these areas to a far greater number of climbers than has previously been the case. It is now possible for climbers of moderate ability, with limited budgets, to organise worthwhile expeditions to these regions."

This together with articles such as Pat Littlejohn's in Mountain number 120, in which he calls the Hushe valley the "Chamonix of the Karakoram", have led to an increase in popularity in the area. This will undoubtedly lead to more than one group visiting the area each season, as there are no permit restrictions to prevent it. This is what in fact happened to us. During our later preparations in Britain we became aware that another British group would be in the area at a similar time. The beginning of a real Snells field syndrome. Since it would be impractical, and antisocial to ignore each other, it was decided that a little cooperation could save both groups money eg. supply and general transport costs. The problem then arises that this might contravene some of the regulations of the grant awarding bodies. We felt somewhat a piggy in the middle, the sponsors rules at variance with the physical realities of climbing in this particular area. This became especially complicated during the trip, when due to illness, it became sensible for those in good health from each team to join forces, and embarrassing when it was these pairs that were successful on the peaks.

I am unsure as to whether the other group intend to produce a report, so for the completeness of records I shall list them below, and include them where relevant in ours.

STEPHEN JONES  
ROBERT MARKS  
DAVID PICKLES

### AREA.

Karakorum Range, northeast Pakistan. The Charakusa Glacier runs from east to west, parallel to the Baltoro Glacier, but 10 miles further south. A barrier of high peaks running from Masherbrum to Chogolisa divides the Baltoro from the Charakusa Glacier. Access to the Charakusa is by jeep from Skardu, to the village of Hushe, a 9 hour drive over rough roads. From here, it is a 3 day walk to base camp, situated at the foot of K6 and K7.

The trip was planned to last for between 6-8 weeks, dependant upon the weather, and the health of the team.

#### LONDON TO BASE CAMP.

We obtained Air Kuwait flights to Karachi, through a bucket shop, at a cost of £290 each. This was the cheapest method, but had it's hidden costs!

The perennial problem of excessive baggage was overcome by a timely wedged Koflach under the scales at the airport. The hostesses seem inquisitive upon your boarding, clad in every stitch you possess, and incredulous as you depart with half a dozen bags. "how did they get them on?" It is not a certainty that these tactics will work, if someone wants to be officious they will be, but nothing ventured nothing gained.

Upon arrival in Karachi, ignore the taxi drivers and look out for the minibuses. You will still be ripped off, but not by half as much. Do not worry about being pestered by the irate taxi drivers, the police will come up and beat them off with their sticks. Welcome to Pakistan!

The train journey is 28 hours up to Rawalpindi/Islamabad, being almost exactly 1000 miles. This on top of the 15 hour flight, dramatic changes in the climate, your diet, and then theres the water. All these factors, major in their own right were catastrophic in combination. Everyone was extremely ill during this week of travel. Andy was awoken by a thump in the middle of one night to find Bob sprawled across the floor in the bathroom, unconscious. I mention all this to illustrate why next time I will spend the extra £200 to fly direct to Rawalpindi. There is saving money, and there is false economy, but the choice must be yours.

In Islamabad we stayed at the Sherhazad Hotel (Supermarket, Markaz Shalimar 6, Islamabad), a modest hotel at a modest price. From here we hired a minibus to transport us and our gear (too heavy to take on the internal flight to Skardu), along the Karakoram Highway, another 18 hours. From Skardu we continued in two jeeps on to Hushe in a further 8 hours.

En route we came across a disturbing phenomena, which I feel will only increase with time. Historically, the roadhead has not always been Hushe, eg. in the past it was once Khaplu, and it has only been with the passage of time that it has extended to Hushe. The site of the roadhead will be the site that you hire your porters from. This is an increasingly important source of employment for local people who wish to "get on". Therefore villages which were previous roadheads, are now bypassed, their past porter industry is no more (this of course does not include the cream of the porters who will always travel to the Baltoro). It affects the majority of villagers in these bypassed towns that subsidised their income by occasional portages. Politically this is important within the valley. Hushe has always been the largest town, now it is the roadhead it is also the largest source of porters, this in turn is bringing a new relative prosperity, at a cost to villages down the valley, which are consequently contracting. The situation is ripe for resentment, and actions emanating from this.

We had been told that the road was blocked before Hushe, and that we would therefore need porters to take us the last stage. With this knowledge, we approached the village of Candi, to see in the distance a cloud of dust. Upon our arrival a small landslide stopped us at the village! Now some accuse me of being a sceptic. The villagers told us that the road was even worse a little further on, so we investigated. Sure enough one mile on the road had been completely washed away, but had now been repaired, though not yet passed. Slightly different from their story. The plot thickened. Whilst I sympathised with the loss of their previous roadhead monopoly. These tactics, neglecting to tell us the road had been mended, and handy landslides in the town I found sad. They even then tried to convince our drivers that the repair they had just effected was unsafe. However we prevailed (I am not sure how), and were thus able to proceed.

Incidents such as this, untruths, "delays" in road repairs, will I feel unfortunately become more common. Westerners, or rather our money has arrived, what price progress?

In Hushe David re-met Hussain and Javed, our local contacts who acted as our agents, hiring porters, and purchasing local foods. This is perhaps not normal practice, as they were already David's agents to his trekking firm.

Our budget was for 30 porters, so when we discovered we had 53 loads, out came the chequebooks. Our small expedition, our lightweight expedition had somehow disappeared. The 4 day walk up may be easily accomplished in 3. The porters do not mind in the least. The sum is fixed for them, being based upon distance not time, so the sooner they can return, the sooner they can continue what they were doing. The only thing stopping them trying it in one day is the weak and feeble climbers who cannot keep up. I would like to hire a Balti porter for the Karrimor Mountain Marathon!

### Base Camp and Climbs

Once at Base Camp we set to exploring the immediate area. The area to the north was guarded by gruelling scree slopes, which had to be climbed to reach any of the mountains behind.

TDK. Spire was climbed after a two week build up. We decided to climb this first as we thought that a relatively slow rock climb would be easier to acclimatise upon than a mixed route. This was in fact a fallacy, trying to pull up with your arms at altitude is far more difficult than slogging up a snow slope. 3 trips to the base were used to build up a stock of food and equipment. The first foray onto the face was very educational. Climbing in the early hours is extremely cold, I wore an old pair of mitts, which proved particularly useful in the ice filled cracks. On this occasion we were stopped by the aid section at just below half height. Our final push was thus planned to last 2 days, so as to climb only while the sun was on the face. A leisurely first day was spent climbing to our previous high point fixing ropes. The next day we jumared up these, before the sun arrived so we were at our high point ready to push to the top with maximum day light. This we managed successfully, being back down at our bivi by 5pm. The spire was not as tall as we had expected, its scale being very difficult for us to judge. We only really found out its true size after our first day on it. Excellent views from the top were seen, including a view of Chris and Jill attempting Pimple Peak.

Pimple Peak as it became known, proved an elusive peak if ever there was one. Although it appeared to be of easy access, and moderate technical difficulty, a heavily crevassed (mostly hidden) approach, together with an uncanny coincidence between attempts and poor weather repelled some 4 forays.

Meanwhile, more successfully Nasa Peak was next climbed. As with TDK Spire an initial trip to climb Nasa had previously narrowly failed. The next attempt, armed with the lessons learnt stormed to the summit of this shapely peak in a quick time. The approach to this peak unfortunately earned the infamous title of "the longest scree slope in the known world".

In addition to the shapely rock spires, the peak Mount Beatrice separating TDK. and Nasa looked interesting. From the opposite side of the valley a couloir could be seen to run from the bottom all the way to the top. This deserved investigation. From the bottom, it appeared to be an easy angled snow plod. 12 hours later on grade 3 ice, with no gear, because it was only a short snow plod we retreated due to falling rocks and fear. The next team to attempt it left earlier, and with some gear, making a successful and long days outing.

We also explored up into the Dryfika basin to the south, establishing an Advanced Base Camp after a two day walk. Dryfika is another shapely peak, but we resisted temptation, as it is over 6000m, and has anyway, already been climbed. Our attention swung to the other surrounding peaks. Cobra peak is an easy 4 hour climb from Advance Base Camp in the basin, and affords good views.



We at first attempted a small peak to the side of 5944m peak, our chosen goal. Half way up at 2am in waist deep powder on a 50° slope with powder avalanches raining, we turned around. This peak formed a continuous face with 5944, so we concluded that its face would also be too much for us. This left only one real alternative, Poro Peak. From Cobra this appears an easy snow slope leading to a narrow, steep sided summit ridge. The snow ridge is easy, but the rock was a good illustration of the different rock types that may be encountered. Very steep choss, with very few reliable belays, in marked contrast to the nearby spires of compact Granite. The twin summits were attained by an excursion across the east face, avoiding the ridge pinnacles.

Upon our return from Poro we found that some of the others had attempted Sulo, by its established route, and narrowly missed being wiped out by a large block trundling down the obvious central couloir when they were only 10 minutes into the route. They retired gracefully, with frayed nerves.

In addition while at Base Camp, fine cragging is to be found on the lower flanks of Nasa, and excellent boulders abound.

Towards the end of our stay the weather became colder and less settled, so a trek was preferred to continued climbing. We decided to attempt a crossing of the Masherbrum La, for views of the Baltoro Glacier. Crossing the pass involves negotiating a series of ice falls. This undoubtedly gave us our hardest climbing to date (only if you choose the wrong route), leaving us half way up the ice falls, with fresh snow falling. We decided to camp. Two days later, and 3-4' deep it stopped. So we reluctantly left our cosy haven and wallowed back down to Hushe, and on home. This passed without great incident except for the airport, where we were asked for £200 excess baggage. They are harsh, but if you break down in tears and roll around the floor, they might let you on free also.

#### Other Worthwhile Objectives in the Area.

Rock: Towers and buttresses on the South side of the glacier, granite faces of about 2,000' necessitating multiday portaledge tactics probably.

Snow/Ice: The headwall of the valley looks to provide long serious climbing of perhaps up to 8000' in length. All the mountains named on the map have been climbed, but still leave many fine lines. However below 6000m the remaining unclimbed peaks are few, but include 5944 in the text, and a line of 3 linked peaks to the north of TDK Spire.

## EQUIPMENT

### HARDWARE.

As our exact objectives were not decided upon until our arrival, we took equipment for three simultaneous climbs.

#### A Big Wall

2	sets Petzl ascenders
1	11mm rope
2	9 mm rope
2	sets of Rocks 1-9
8	Friends -4
40	carabiners
10	short slings
6	long slings
8	pegs

#### A Mixed Route

2	9mm rope
10	short slings
4	long slings
6	tubular drive/screw ins
10	drive ins
1	set of Rocks 1-9
5	Friends 1-3
8	pegs
20	carabiners

#### A Day on the Glacier

2	9mm rope
1	set of Rocks 1-9
2	tubular drive ins
4	drive ins
4	short slings
2	long slings

Each individual was further required to provide themselves with;

1	harness
3	screw gate carabiners
1	Sticht plate
1	descender
1	set of Prussic loops
2	Ice axes
1	Helmet (supplied by Phoenix)

The sum total of this gear was such, that a pooling of the available equipment covered all our needs. We considered purchasing new equipment, but this proved to be extremely expensive. It was decided that any significant gear loses by the expedition would be compensated by the members upon our return.

We took 2 extra ropes as spares. These were eventually used when we lost 2 ropes on the descent from Poro peak, one rope jamming, and having to be cut, the other cut in rock fall (all good fun at the time). We also took a 200m reel of polypropylene rope to be used as fixed line. In the event this made a nice seat at base camp. No one found the motivation to carry it anywhere, or any reel (sorry) need for it.

### CLOTHING

For climbing in this region of the Karakoram on peaks below 20,000', a good set of European Alpine clothing was found to be necessary.

First layer: A full set of thermal underwear. Some people used Lifa wear, others heavier, warmer types.

Second layer: Salopettes, either fibrepile, or fabric, Goretex insulated would probably be over kill. Topped by shirts and fibre pile jackets/fleece jumpers.

Third layer: Mid weight down jackets eg. Mountain Lightlines/Annapurnas. A set of breathable waterproofs, preferably mid weight also.

The essence of the clothing is as in the Alps. During the day, temperatures soar, it is very hot. You must be able to strip down (whilst not burning), and not end up with an enormous load. This must be weighed against carrying adequate light warm clothing to combat the sub zero night temperatures.

### FOOTWEAR

On our feet we all wore Koflac boots (Vivas and Ultras), finding them perfectly adequate for extended use. We found no need for top of range boots or uprated inners. Good new loopstitch socks were used by us all, kindly supplied by Northstar.

For the walk in, and general Base Camp use, we found a good light weight walking boot essential. We all extensively wore our walking boots, kindly supplied to us by Aigle for testing. Trainers are also useful for Base Camp use.

### HANDS AND HEAD

Thermal gloves, with fibre pile mitts and breathable outer mitts were found adequate for night climbing, although at least one spare dry set were usually carried by each of us on prolonged outings.

Fleece style balaclavas, together with the duvet hoods were found to be more than adequate for the cold, but a good head covering must also be worn during the day, as protection from the sun. Plenty of strong sun barriers (never mind your 6 or 15 factor, it must be 24), and plenty of after sun lotion, you will burn! Our Piz Buin sun cream proved to be effective and pleasant to use.

### SLEEPING BAGS

Most of the expedition members took good 4-5 season bags, many taking Rab Premier 900 bags. These were found to be more than warm enough. I used a 3 season bag throughout the period, often having to sleep with my duvet on



also (ie. do not cut corners here), I am buying a new bag for next year. We all used Goretex bivi bags extensively, standard kit today.

All these efforts are useless without Karrimats. We were supplied with the Extreme, which we found adequate for all but extended camping on the glacier, when a piece of extra cardboard under the hip was preferred also.

### Tents

For Base Camp, any average hike tent would be adequate. The weather was never that severe to warrant mountain tents exclusively. Just make sure you have enough room.

We also had the use of a frame tent at base. I cannot over emphasise the need for some communal shelter, to cook and eat in. It provided protection from the fierce midday sun, and was warm with the cooking on cold freezing nights. The cost of freight and portage is repaid tenfold in making life bearable at Base Camp.

For the hill we used two tents, a Snowden Moulding Limpet, and a Wild Country Quasar. Both were necessary. At one point the Quasar took a snow fall of over 3' in 2 days, almost burying us. Their self supporting nature is invaluable on glaciers.

### RUCKSACKS

We used Karrimor Alpinistes exclusively for climbing. Both the 55 and 65 models were large enough to cope with trips lasting up to 8 days. We each in addition used at least one further similar size rucksack to transport all our gear from the UK.

### COOKING

For Base Camp we bought large parafin stoves in Skardu (about £3 each). For the hill we took a variety of other stoves. At Advanced Base Camp we used Optimus parafin stoves, heavy, but plenty of fuel. For routes we used the Epigas Backpacker and Alpinist stoves. The Backpacker was excellent, but the Alpinist had serious faults. Most of these have been corrected in the latest model, but we still have reservations as to its suitability for this form of use. We also took a supply of solid fuel stoves Fire Stars supplied by Evotec. These we used as emergency stoves, or as brew kits. 100% reliable if not slow but light, we were surprised how often we ended up using them!

## FOOD

### Shipped in Advance

This may be broadly classified as food for the hill. I do not intend to write an exhaustive food list. Dehydrated food is rare in Pakistan, soups and such meals must be imported with you. The same is true of chocolate and tinned meat or fish. For convenience teabags and coffee are also useful to bring. Exceptions to this are dried milk, it is full fat and in plentiful supply.

The problem with today's diet, is that it is calorie controlled. Everything is skimmed, or only has 50 calories. To keep up the necessary daily intake one needs to drink 60 cup soups a day! What happened to good old fat, I do not joke that it is no wonder you lose so much weight while climbing.

It is important to check the current import regulations and shipping details if you wish to avoid disappointment. We found it invaluable to use a Pakistani agent to overcome the administrative problems. We would like to acknowledge the assistance of Ghulam Ahmed and Mohamed Ali Chengezi for acting on our behalf.

### Bought in Pakistan

This may be called Base Camp food. A large variety of dried vegetables and pulses, together with as broad a supply of herbs spices and sauces should be bought in the markets. Buy quality rice, if you buy the cheapest you will see why the Pakistanis feed it only to animals. Biscuits jam and the tinned cheese are all highly recommended

In the actual valley fresh potatoes, spinach, rhubarb, meat, and the occasional egg are seasonally available.

I make two strong recommendations. A cook costs the princely sum of £3 a day, about £100 a month. All meals are prepared and cleared, with the best will in the world a rota system will lead to group arguments. Your cook will be able to offer a variety of good meals, beyond daily bean curry. You can still cook if you wish, but now you have the choice. He is a local you will learn about their country and customs. He will guarantee the good will of the village if you treat him well. Secondly, when you are buying your supplies, buy more than you need. You will be fully acclimatised, fit, and ready for the big one at the end of your trip. You do not want to be left eating those leftovers no liked at the beginning, because that is all there is left. It adds to the adventure, but not the climbing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following companies who generously donated their products and services and without whom the expedition could not have happened.

Academy Leisure - Aigle footwear  
Batchelors Foods Ltd.  
Carrington Performance Fabrics - Cyclone  
Drinkmaster Ltd.  
Evotec Ltd. - Firestar stoves  
Karrimor International  
Laughton & Sons Ltd. - Twinco tableware  
Nikwax  
Northstar - socks  
Phoenix  
Piz Buin  
Ron Hill  
St. Ivel Ltd.  
Shepherd Boy  
Sorbothane  
Spenco Medical (UK) Ltd.  
Triwall Ltd. - boxes

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Allcord Ltd.  
High Adventure  
Rab Carrington

We would like to extend a special thankyou to the following Companies and Bodies for their generous donations and approval.

The Mount Everest Foundation  
The British Mountaineering Council  
Barrie Fielder Technical Services.

This report contains only a summary of the important events and details of our expedition. To write a comprehensive account would result in a book, and there are many of them. If however you have found some of this report helpfull, and would like some further details, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Expedition member David Hamilton and myself as a result of our experiences have formed a partnership High Adventure, running trekking and mountaineering trips to the Karakoram. We therefore visit and ship equipment to Pakistan annually. If you would like to take advantage of this facility, again please contact us.

Wishing you luck and success in your own venture



John Stiles