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88/46

BRITISH SHANI SOUTH FACE EXPEDITION

MAY 29th-JULY18th 1988

M.E.F. Reference 88/46

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623

Members

| | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Paul Bale | Martin Price |
| Caroline Kozaka | Richard Spillet |
| Andy Macnae | Stephen Thompson |
| Dave Cosford | |

I first heard about Shani in November 1987 from a friend who had visited the Naltar valley the previous spring. He described a large unclimbed south face on a mountain with very easy access from the Karakoram Highway. It sounded exactly what we were searching for, the perfect objective for a small team to transfer their Scottish and Alpine experience to the Himalaya.

A report by Steven Venables in 'High' magazine gave details of the first and only ascent of the mountain by the west ridge in 1986 by Roger Everett and Guy Muhlemann. We telephoned Roger in Glasgow and he was very helpful with lots of details and photographs. A previous attempt on the south east face had been made in October 1984 by Steven Venables and Dick Renshaw which failed because of bad weather. Steven kindly lent us slides he had taken on that trip. The north face looked impressive, and to be avoided. The south face was big, c2000M, with no obviously easy line to the summit, the word from the BMC national office was "TD/ED all round". We were eager to get to Pakistan.

From London to Gilgit

Because of job commitments and limited holiday time the expedition set out in two groups. The first consisting of Paul, Andy, Martin and Dave left London on May 29th and arrived at base camp about 1 week later. Richard, Caroline and myself left Heathrow on June 18th and joined the advance party a few days later. Dave went home at this point to leave the six of us together for a month at base camp.

Both groups flew with PIA direct to Islamabad taking all gear and vast amounts of dehydrated food onto the aircraft. Richard, Caroline and myself arrived at Islamabad at 5.00am on 19th June. A bumpy taxi ride took us to Pir Wadhai bus station where the Natco Deluxe service to Gilgit was waiting to leave at 9.00am. We were fortunate to get the best seats (at the front) and settled down for the long journey. The Natco Deluxe is probably the best value if travelling to Gilgit by road. The cost (120Rp) is reasonable, the luggage rack copious and the company of fellow travellers very enjoyable. The journey took us 18hrs and try as we might it was impossible to sleep. It is possible to fly to Gilgit from Islamabad. Although ludicrously cheap (about 200Rp) and very fast (2-3Hrs) flights are weather dependent and the baggage space is restricted.

We arrived in Gilgit at 3.00am on the 20th and after a short rest we made for the Hunza Inn and news of the rest of the team which had presumably passed through a few weeks earlier.

The Hunza Inn acts as a focus for many expeditions to this

part of the Karakoram. On route to the mountains its basic comforts are a preparation for the rigours ahead; on return from base camp its garden, verandas and unceasing supply of tea and toast provides the sort of civilising relief needed. The proprietor is also very helpful in organising transport, cooks etc. With his help a jeep and driver were quickly organised, a price agreed (500Rp) and put at our disposal for the rest of the day. The morning was spent in the Bazaar in Gilgit collecting food and fuel before driving up the Karakoram highway and lower Naltar valley to reach the roadhead at Naltar that evening.

One of the main choices we faced early in our planning was the choice of the most suitable type of stove, bearing in mind the availability of fuels in Pakistan and the impracticability of air freighting gas for an expedition of our size with limited resources. For some of us there was only one choice, the MSR Multifuel. The more parsimonious took what we considered the next best thing, a Coleman Multifuel. The Colemans turned out to be the most useless piece of expedition equipment. Kerosine, their preferred fuel surprisingly turned out to be unobtainable in any quantity in Gilgit and they instantly clogged when run on the local petrol. Their antispill feature made it difficult to remove the offending fuel without complete disassembly. The MSRs struggled on the petrol even when filtered if they were not cleaned daily. Although gas stoves were not taken on our trip it was possible to find a limited selection of gas canisters, often in very bad condition, among the tins of cheese and piles of K2 cigarettes in hardware shops and grocers in Gilgit.

Gilgit to Base camp 20th-22nd June.

Once out of Gilgit we turned off the Karakoram highway and headed north-west up into the gorge of the Naltar river which plunges down to meet the Hunza valley at Nomal. For most of its length the road hugged the river channel, cut deep into the sediments, with massive conglomerate cliffs towering above us. That evening we arrived at Naltar and spent the night in the rest house. Although pleasant it is probably easier to camp outside sparing some expense (100Rp) and since our room did not have a bed, the discrepancy in comfort would be minimal.

The locals were very keen to act as porters and people appeared soon after our arrival. Initially we were told that Shani was '2 sleeps away' that is a three day walk. However this sounded suspicious and it quickly became a 'one sleep' or two day walk-in. This was even an overestimation, on the way back we completed the walkout in a single day carrying heavy loads. The amount of food and equipment we had to carry up to base camp required two porters each, the fact that the loads went onto donkeys and sundry 'porters' and other interested parties wandered along behind seemed immaterial. It is important here to agree a certain number of porters and a price and stick to it. We were charged 120Rp per 25Kg load per day. The porters were also paid for the return unladen journey (albeit half price) and were therefore paid in total for three days work. The walk from Naltar to base camp can be done by the villagers in a single day if the standard three day's wages is paid.

The first day's walk on 21st June was a pleasant 12Km stroll through beautiful alpine scenery to the Naltar lakes. These, a cluster of clear, trout filled pools lie next to the Naltar river and make a very pleasant camp site. At noon on the 22nd June after an even shorter days walk (2-3hrs) we reached the terminal moraine of the Shani glacier and the site of our base camp. It had taken us just under 5 days from Heathrow. None of us experienced any problems of acclimatization in travelling so quickly to this point at 3450M and because of the rapid approach we also managed to avoid all of the gastrointestinal problems often associated with longer approach marches.

The Naltar valley

The complete expedition was now together, although Dave Cosford who had been out for the three weeks prior to our arrival had left. Everything was well organised at base camp. Issa Khan, a chain smoking Ismaeli from Daniol had been taken on as cook and camp guard (110Rp per day) and had built himself a sturdy if not entirely waterproof cookhouse from which for the next month came a constant supply of chapattis and dhal.

In the time before our arrival the advance party had been active with acclimatization trips to some of the surrounding peaks in the valley. Initial attempts were made on South Twin (5640M), on Snow Dome and an attempt by Paul and Andy on an unnamed summit, christened Issa peak in honour of our cook, which lay above the summer shielding of Gupo. On our arrival Andy and Paul returned exhausted from their first attempt on

Shani's south east face. They had attempted to climb the prominent ridge which runs up past a triangular snow field to the steep half-height headwall. Andy takes up the account of their two days on the face.

"A camp was made on the glacier at the base of the face at 3600M. An early start next morning at 4.30 led up an avalanche cone at 3900M before being forced onto the rock. Initially the climbing was very easy and good progress was made. A powerful avalanche came down the face from the upper snow field at 9.30. Luckily it was channeled away from us. Some doubt arose as to the condition of the upper part of the face which we would have to cross. At 10.30 the base of the first tower was reached on the ridge below the headwall. The climbing now became unexpectedly difficult. The rock consisted of steep overlapping granite slabs with little gear. Bale led a very impressive 5a pitch with very little gear and a heavy 18Kg sack. A hanging belay was necessary for the next pitch led by Bale sans sack. Whilst I was belaying I was hit by heavy rockfall and sustained painful bruising to my leg and elbow. A bivi ledge was found after one more pitch and gratefully accepted. We had climbed approximately 700M that day. That evening we took the decision to retreat. We were tired and bruised. The unexpected climbing would have added at least an extra day, more likely two, to our initial estimate. The condition of the upper snow-field judging from the amount of rubbish falling onto us looked poor."

The weather by this time had set fair and was to dictate the pattern of the climbing for the remainder of the trip. Nights were cold and clear whilst the days were cloudless and very hot to an extent which made climbing during the day very

uncomfortable. The heat was scorching and totally strength sapping, snow conditions rapidly deteriorated as soon as the sun rose and all progress inevitably ground to a halt soon after dawn.

A few days rest at base camp gave us newcomers time to acclimatise and explore further up the Naltar valley. We were camped by the snout of the Shani glacier, surrounded by the rubble and debris of glacial erosion. Although dusty the site was sheltered and with a clean stream nearby. Further up the valley steep pasture stretched up the hillsides grazed by herds of cattle and horses. Spring comes late to these high valleys and now in late June the hillsides were awash with colour from the profusion of wild flowers. Cranesbill, Columbine and Campion, knee deep in places. Clouded Yellows, Blues and Apollo butterflies were in abundance. The aroma of wild thyme rose from underfoot as we tramped the hillsides gathering the rhubarb which grew everywhere. Shani is Urdu for 'flower garden' which is a most apt description.

Over the period of 25th-29th June a second assault was made by us all on South Twin. We crossed the upper Shani and Phakor glaciers and established a high camp below South Twin at 4850M. It was only possible to move at night and the days were spent brewing and sitting out the scorching heat in the tents. Richard, Caroline and myself were insufficiently acclimatised to make a serious attempt on the summit, Andy and Martin however were going strong. Andy takes up the story again.

"We left the high camp at 00.30 on 28th June and quickly gained our previous high point after which the going became

increasingly tiring. The snow was deep and of variable quality. Trail breaking was hard work. Two steep bergshrunds, the first real obstacles, were easily overcome. Next a "whaleback", a steep ridge occupying the central part of the face. This gave the worst snow conditions with steps collapsing into one another. Price led strongly, I floundered behind. Above easy slopes were climbed with relief as daylight arrived. Heavy cloud cover thankfully prevented excessive heat and snow melt. The last 150M held the major obstacles. The first, a steep 'shrund gave some very technical and unstable snow/ice climbing for Price which led to the edge of the face and a knife edge ridge. The summit pyramid consisted of a 60° slope protected by a steep 'shrund. Snow conditions deteriorated just below the top. In great fear Pricey led to the top, 9.30am, I followed wearily. The descent followed the same route but in very bad snow conditions with much crevasse and bergshrund jumping. We reached the tents at 12.30pm,"

We all returned to base camp to rest and recuperate and to be fed copious amounts by Issa our cook. From Gilgit we had brought large quantities of rice, dhal and flour plus other non-perishables, a few tins (very expensive) together with root vegetables and fruit which kept reasonably fresh for a few weeks. This was supplemented by two additional food runs into Gilgit by Martin and Issa. In addition fresh meat was obtained "on the hoof" in the form of a sheep and two chickens supplied by the local farmers. The resulting mutton was buried in the glacier and kept well for three weeks. The local inhabitants also kept us well supplied with fresh milk and eggs and

occasionally brought us cheese and a very powerful lassi milk drink.

On the evening of July 5th Richard and I prepared food and equipment for a second attempt on Shani's south east face. The line attempted by Paul and Andy would have eventually led to very steep climbing up the headwall and we therefore intended to try a line further to the left, up a ridge which ran up the left hand end of this central headwall. We crossed the rubble strewn glacier and camped at the foot of the immense east face that evening. Starting just before sunrise we climbed the avalanche cone which gave us access to the lower rock bands. Again, although the climbing was at a reasonable standard, we were handicapped by the amount of gear needed for the upper snow fields and mixed ground ahead. Stonefall clattered down on each side. We climbed until noon, covering about 500M and reached a sloping earth ledge. At this point we experienced the first and only rain of the entire trip. A good time and place to get into the bivi tent and keep dry. The rain stopped, we dumped our sacs and cragged on a further 150M to near Paul and Andy's high point. It was not possible to reach the leftward trending ridge. From the base of the triangular snowfield a large waterfall divided the left hand ridge from the right hand one on which we stood. We were weary, and doubtful about breaching the headwall onto the upper snowfield. There was still a lot of rock fall and the condition of the upper slopes looked poor. Returning back down to our bivi ledge the decision was made to retreat. We arrived at base camp late next day with our tails between our legs.

At the same time that Richard and I were on Shani, Andy and Paul had successfully climbed a new route up the north west face of Mehrbani to its north summit at 5450M. This spectacular peak rose directly above base camp to the east. From the valley its three summits were deceptive, the north peak appeared to be the highest; this is the one Andy and Paul went for. Andy describes their ascent.

"Leaving base camp at around midday on 5th July we trudged up to a bivi low on the face at 4600M, reaching it just before 6.00pm. After food and kip we set off onto the steep snow face at around 1.00am. The face receives a considerable amount of stone fall, hence the night ascent. The going was excellent and we reached the north ridge by sunrise (5.00am) at an altitude of 5350M. We failed on the breakfast: the MSR blocked on the lousy petrol and the pricker broke, misery. The ridge above was deceptive and gave three difficult and contrasting pitches. The first with steep ice, the second mixed with long serious sections on poor snow, the third, technical mixed climbing up steep grooves. We reached the summit at 9.00am, altitude, 5450M. To our dismay, on the last pitch to the summit, Bale discovered a loop of tat on what we thought to be a virgin peak. To add insult to injury we also found that the north summit was by no means the highest top and a very unstable looking corniced ridge separated it from the middle summit. Time and courage did not allow for a traverse so a nerve racking descent was made down the north ridge. We labouriously downclimbed the face we had come up a few hours earlier. Snow conditions were poor by this time and occasional stonefall speeded progress. Two tired souls reached base camp at 6.00pm

that evening".

Food supplies at base camp were now running short. Nor was there sufficient time left from our allotted period for a third attempt at Shani's south east face. Martin had left for Gilgit in an attempt to throw off a stomach bug which had affected him for most of his stay at base camp. I was feeling very weak, the result of the intense heat and consequent mild sunstroke.

We decided to spend the remaining time on Sentinel peak. Known locally as Bazega peak this lies at the head of the Shani glacier to the north of the Phakor pass. Climbed originally from the north east ridge by Roger Everett's team we thought the route could be straightened out directly up the south east spur to the top. After the first day out of base camp I was again left nauseous and weak. Spending the day in a clay-oven of a tent now became unbearable. Andy and Richard continued and climbed the south east spur early in the morning of 11th July. They found surprisingly easy climbing, only three pitches needed belaying. The rock was very broken, mainly consisting of frozen shale. They reached the summit at 6.30am and returned to base camp via the north east ridge route the same day.

A few days later we left on the final walkout to Gilgit. With the help of two porters (1 donkey !) we reached Naltar by midday and with all equipment loaded onto a Jeep we were in Gilgit by late afternoon.

Although unsuccessful in our main objective of climbing Shani's south east face, a lot of information and experience was obtained from our two attempts. We believe this to be the highest point yet gained on the face. Conditions in the valley dramatically improved during the period of our stay and probably reached their best on Shani as we were unfortunately preparing to leave. The challenge of this superb south face still remains.

In addition to this the first ascent of South Twin was completed together with establishing new routes on Mehrbani and Sentinel, all in lightweight Alpine style. The ascents of Mehrbani and Sentinel constitute either their second or third ascents.

Summary of Peaks and Routes

25th-29th June, South Twin, (5640M), N.Face, 790M, 12Hrs

A. Macnae, M. Price.

4th-5th July, Mehrbani North, (5450M), N.W.Face, 850M ascent

TDinf (final pitches, Scottish IV/V), 2000M descent, 17Hrs

P. Bale, A. Macnae.

10th-12th July, Sentinel South, (5260M), S.E.Spur, 450M, ADsup

4.5Hrs. A.Macnae, R.Spillet.

Route times include ascent and descent.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the help of the M.E.F. and the B.M.C./Sports Council who helped make our expedition possible. Also the help of Mrs. M. Lawrence, PIA, Cardiff.

Accounts

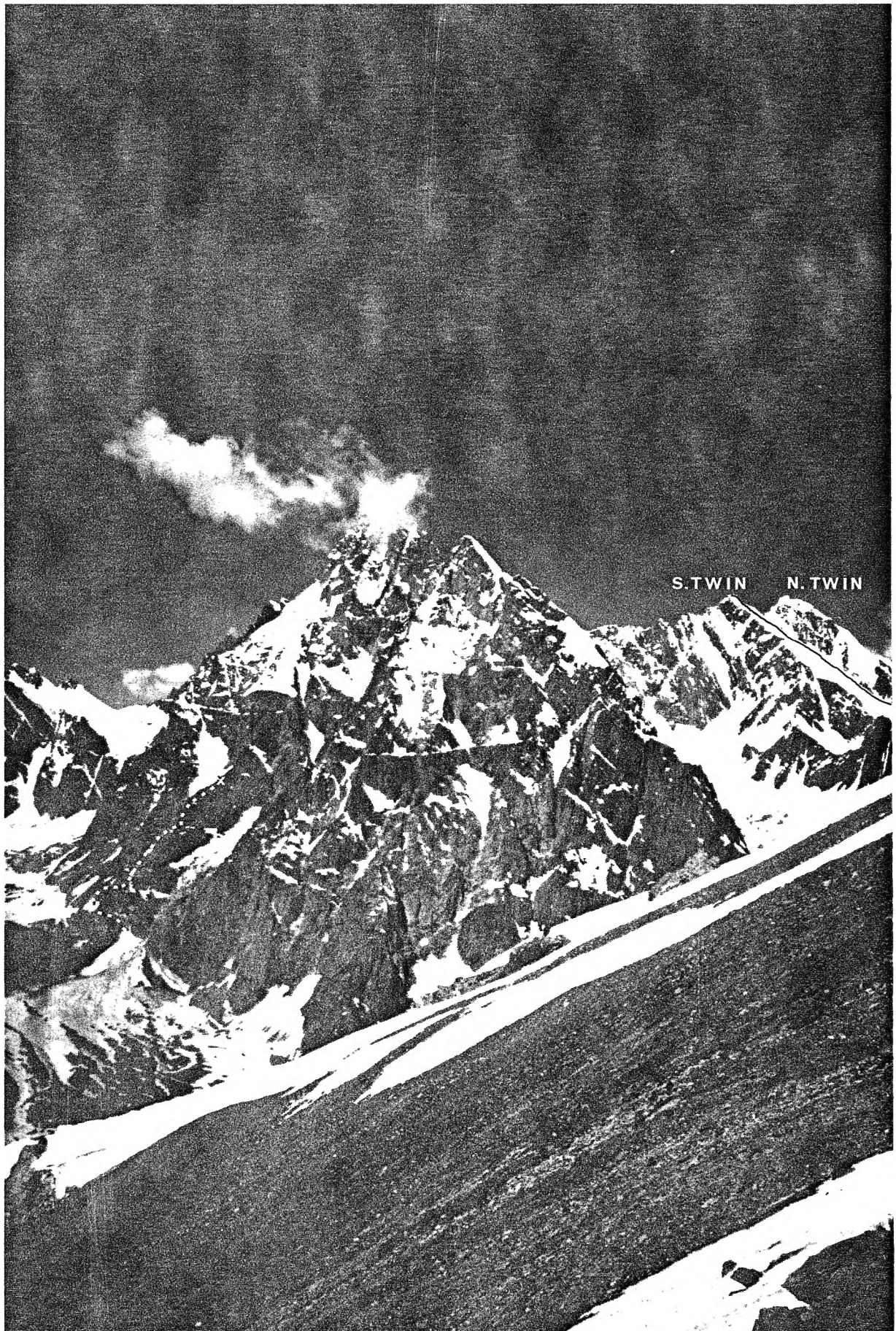
| | Expenditure | | Income |
|---------------|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Flights (7) | £3290.00 | M.E.F. | £500.00 |
| Insurance | £630.00 | B.M.C. | £500.00 |
| Visa's | £175.00 | Personal contributions | £950.00 |
| Accommodation | £67.00 | | |
| Transport | £97.51 | | |
| Porters | £88.00 | | |
| Cook/BC guard | £166.66 | | |
| Food/Fuel | £187.50 | | |
| Miscellaneous | £33.33 | | |
| Equipment | <u>£2915.00</u> | | <u> </u> |
| total | £7650.00 | total | £7650.00 |
| Exchange rate | 30.00 Rp = £1.00. | | |

Stephen Thompson

Andy Macnae

Shani S.E.Face high point and route shown

Route on South Twin also shown



British Shani south face expedition 1988

Peaks climbed by the expedition ▲

Rivers ~~~~~

Glacier limits (Shani area) - - - - -

