

THE INTERNATIONAL HUSHE VALLEY EXPEDITION 1989

SUMMARY REPORT

1. Expedition Members

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|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Andrew McLean - Leader | Peter Lowe |
| Eric Argent | Christopher McLean |
| David Cowell | William Money-Kyrle |
| Dr. Ceri Davies | Brian Quilty - Doctor |
| Rachel Gough - Doctor | Luke Tattersall |
| James Hart | Brian Weedon |
| Juliet Heath | Lynn Weedon |
| Sara Horsfall | |

2. Objectives

The objectives determined in the U.K. were several unclimbed rock spires of approximately 5800m. in height situated to the west of K6 and K7 on the Charakusa Glacier near to the Hushe Valley in Northern Pakistan. From the information and photographs available, a group of three rock spires had attracted our attention. The pictures that we had seen gave us the impression that the spires would offer solid routes on steep rock which we had hoped yield to 'big wall' tactics which a number of the team had developed on the Salathe Wall of El Capitan in Yosemite Valley. It was also our intention to explore the area, which has been relatively unexploited by mountaineering expeditions in the past, with a view to climbing mixed routes of ice and snow. Our research had revealed a large number of mountains which appeared to offer long, steep ice routes.

On arrival at K7 base camp, we were forced to revise our main objective on finding that the rock on the spires was far from inspiring! The rock was loose and the routes on both the ridges and faces meandered indirectly to the summits of the spires. Also as a result of adverse weather conditions we were forced to change the emphasis from ice/snow routes to those mountains where rock predominated due to extremely heavy snowfall and consequent unstable conditions. Nonetheless, in all but the heaviest of storms we enjoyed demanding and, to varying degrees, successful climbing.

3. Expedition Dates

Sunday 9th July	Advance party of 5 leaves U.K.
Thursday 13th July	Advance party fly to Skardu
Sunday 16th July	Main party of 8 leaves U.K.
Monday 17th July	2 members flying from U.S.A. and Australia arrive in Islamabad
Wednesday 19th July	Main party departs Rawalpindi by minibus to travel Karakorum Highway to Skardu
Thursday 20th July	Expedition members united in Skardu
Friday 21st July	Travel by jeep to Kane
Saturday 22nd July	Commencement of walk-in. Half day journey to Hushe village
Sunday 23rd July	Saitcho
Monday 24th July	Spanza
Tuesday 25th July	To K7 base camp
Wednesday 26th July to Monday 21st August	Climbing and trekking period
Tuesday 22nd August	To Saitcho
Wednesday 23rd August	To Kane
Thursday 24th August	To Skardu
Saturday 26th August	Leave Skardu, fly to Rawalpindi
Sunday 27th August	Fly to Karachi
Monday 28th August	To Cairo
Tuesday 29th August	To London Heathrow

4. Weather conditions

Throughout the climbing period the weather was changeable and virtually unpredictable. Clouds approaching base camp from a S.E. direction usually heralded a period of stormy weather. However, bad weather came in from all directions. After two days of sunny and very hot weather upon our arrival at base camp we were incarcerated in our tents for four days by continuous snow and heavy rain. Six inches of snow was deposited on our base camp and seriously loaded the snow fields of surrounding peaks.

Indeed, once the weather had cleared, the valley resounded to the rumbling avalanches crashing down the mountainsides.

We did not experience as prolonged a period of poor weather again following the first week but did not often enjoy more than 2-3 clear days of good weather before it snowed again. There was no pattern to the weather change, although any cloud in the area at daybreak usually stayed for the rest of the day.

At base camp, even when the weather was fine, the temperature plummeted with the disappearance of the sun. On bivouacs at higher altitude the usual safeguards against freezing and the elements were employed.

5. Accidents and illness

There were no serious accidents or injury during the expedition. A couple of team members fell down hidden crevasses but did not sustain any injury. The porters too enjoyed an accident free walk-in and walk-out with us (despite carrying 30 kg. loads). One team member suffered from high altitude sickness at an altitude of approximately 5500m. He responded well to intra- venous diuretics and a rapid descent to base camp assisted by other team members.

Virtually all team members suffered from one or more bouts of gastro-enteritis, usually due to a relaxation of their vigilance in eating locally prepared food in the villages during the walk-in and walk-out.

Technical route description of climbs

The following summits were attempted during the period that we were at base camp:

Charakusa Spires (5500m.)

Nazer Peak (5800m.)

Namika (6325m.)

Sulo (6010m.)

Cobra Peak (5999m.)

(a) Charakusa Spires

(B.Weedon, P.Lowe, A.McLean, L.Tattersall, C.McLean, E.Argent)

The object of the first attempt on the Charakusa Spires was a reconnaissance combined with a period of acclimatisation. From base camp, looking south

across Charakusa glacier we faced the north ridges of the three spires which were well defined, each leading straight from the valley floor to the summit of their respective spire.

We followed a route which took a steep snow gully between the central and the east spire. A further ridge appeared to commence just below the summit of the east spire and connect with the central spire. The object was to climb this to the summit of the central spire. From there we thought that it might be possible to survey the N.E. face of the west spire which was the highest. This face appeared to be near vertical and we hoped that it would offer a possible route.

The steep snow gully was straightforward, rather unconsolidated throughout and precarious at the top. An uncomfortable bivouac was spent on the ridge connecting the east and central spires.

The next morning at least three team members were feeling the effects and were quite washed out.

The ridge appeared from the glacier to be a direct link with the central spire. However it became indistinct, loose and wandering. Progress was slow as a result of difficult route finding, poor rock and illness. By midday on the second day the route was abandoned as much for its lack of attraction as anything and it had also become apparent that lack of acclimatisation and a rapid height gain had affected performance.

During the descent other lines were considered but on inspection with binoculars the same loose rock was evident throughout. The opposite side of the valley had revealed itself from the high point and attention was switched to a number of fine looking peaks.

(b) Nazer peak

(A.McLean, L.Tattersall, D.Cowens, S.Horsfall, W.Money-Kyrle, J.Hart, P.Lowe, B.Weedon)

Over a period of six days four eight members of the expedition stood on the summit of this magnificent peak. From base camp Nazer dominates the view eastwards down the glacier. It appears as an almost perfect pyramid in shape with sharp, straight ridges. The north ridge, previously climbed in 1988 was chosen. The route stays on the north east face for much of its length, joining the ridge for the final three rope lengths.

Access to this ridge was via a long snow gully on the west side of the

peak (when this gully was passed two weeks later during the walk-out virtually all the snow apart from in the upper reaches had disappeared). An area of rock and a saddle of snow at the "notch" where the north ridge started were used as a bivouac site. The second day's climbing on the route starts immediately at a grade of about VS (rock boots were worn for the second day, leaving double mountain boots, crampons etc. at the bivouac site). The climbing throughout is exhilarating on excellent, solid rock. The grade continues to the summit at VS/HVS (5a/b) and finishes with three rope lengths along the dramatic, knife edge ridge. The route is approximately 16 full rope lengths. The descent is by abseil down the ridge, keeping to the NE face. The climb was a highlight for all successful team members.

(c) Namika

(P.Lowe, B.Weedon, L.Weedon, C.Davies)

This peak lies on the south side of the Charakusa glacier, opposite the junction of that glacier with the Chogolisa glacier. It has four ridges and on this occasion the north east ridge was attempted. This required an arduous approach up the northern snow slope through deep snow. A bivouac was made once the ridge had been gained at about a third of the way along. Unfortunately, a severe storm blew up (and blew an empty tent about 30m. depositing it luckily back onto the ridge) after sitting it out for a day the decision was made to retreat to base camp. Due to the lack of a sufficient period of decent weather and also to the significant risk of avalanche, no further attempts were made on this peak.

(d) Sulo

(P.Lowe, B.Weedon)

This peak is situated up the glacier directly behind our base camp and is the last peak of the chain culminating with K7 at the south-eastern end. The route follows an obvious couloire from the glacier which runs south east to north west from the junction with the Charakusa glacier. The couloire meets a rock band at two-thirds height and just before this the route follows an obvious break to the left which opens onto a steep snow

slope which leads to the summit. The ascent of this peak was started at around 3.00am. when the snow gully was frozen. During the climb, the upper snow slope was extremely unstable after only a very short spell of direct sunlight. This was an unfortunate feature of all snow slopes encountered during the expedition as a result of the heavy snowfalls that year.

The summit was reached at about 9.00am and the descent to base camp made the same (long) day.

(e) Cobra peak

This peak had been recommended to us as an ideal acclimatisation trek. The peak is situated on the western side of the glacier which joins the Charakusa glacier just beneath the north face of K6 which dominates the glacial basin from which the Charakusa glacier flows. The route up the glacier - at the head of which the stunningly attractive north face of Drythika dominates the horizon - follows the west side and covers unpleasant, crevassed ground and a menacing serac field. During this trek the weather came down and in the ensuing white-out the way was lost, so much so that a neighbouring 6000m+ peak was almost ascended in error! The weather eventually forced a retreat, during which one team member fell into a water filled crevasse and was totally immersed, an invigorating experience!

(f) Miscellaneous

Behind base camp a steep scree slope to the west is climbed to reach Beatrice, a distinctive, isolated peak bisected by a deep couloire. At the top of the scree slope there are a number of short pinnacles which offer a variety of rock routes, which may be climbed in a day. One such pinnacle was ascended (A.McLean, D.Cowens, R.Gough) during a visit to this area. From the right side of the scree slope facing north east a very sharp pinnacle, with a large roof at half height is obvious. The route takes a line to the left of the roof, starting with three pitches at about HVS and finishing with three enjoyable pitches at severe.

The area also offers innumerable high level trekking opportunities and it is possible to explore northwards almost up to the Baltoro glacier.

By following the glacier past Sulo it is possible to ascend steep snow fields onto a vast snow basin and by crossing this, spectacular views may be enjoyed across the Batowaraho and Kaberi glaciers.

Although the weather conditions did not favour snow and ice routes, there were a sufficient number of rock and mixed routes to ensure the success of this expedition. In the right conditions the area could offer a wealth of spectacular first ascents on steep snow and ice.