

Members

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Objectives

Ascents of Snow Dome (5029m) and Sentinel (5269m) to acclimatise, then attempts at first ascents of North Twin (5798m) and Peak 5963m plus new routes on S ridge of Merhbani (5639m) and NE ridge of Shani (5887m).

Outline of Events

7th-8th June: Paul, Jim and Rik fly to Karachi.
8th-9th June: Train to Rawalpindi - meet Dominic at the railway station.
9th-12th June: Administration in Rawalpindi/Islamabad and hire of cook.
12th-13th June: Bus to Gilgit.
14th June: Jeep to Naltar.
15th June: Expedition all go down with upset stomachs, rest day.
16th-18th June: Two day walk-in stretches to three due to Rik becoming ill with pulmonary oedema.
18th June: Paul, Dom and Jim set up base camp (at 3500m).
19th-24th June: Bad weather.
25th June: Paul, Dom and Jim climb to 4800m to reach the ridge above base camp dividing the Naltar and Daintar valleys. Very poor snow conditions so we did not attempt to follow the ridge to the summit of Snow Dome. Rik arrived at base camp.
26th-27th June: Attempt on Sentinel. Paul returned from the bivi at 4000m with stomach troubles, and Rik was not yet acclimatised so he attempted a subsidiary peak. Jim and Dom climbed to approx 5000m on the south face but were forced to retreat due to poor snow conditions.
29th-30th June: Rik made solo ascent of Snow Dome via west face.
30th June - Jim and Dom attempted first ascent of North Twin. Made two attempts on the north-east ridge, first attempt reached 5200m retreated due to poor snow, second attempt reached 5100m returned as party feeling weak and ill.
2nd July: Paul and Rik make successful ascent of Sentinel via south face.
4th-6th July: Attempt on Peak 5963. Rik stayed at base camp and Dom returned from the first bivi with stomach trouble. Paul and Jim crossed a col at 5000m, just south of Sentinel to reach the col at the foot of 5963 (4800m). Here the weather broke and after sitting it out for 24hrs, Paul and Jim were forced to descend into the Diantar Valley and cross another col back into the Naltar Valley.
9th-11th July: Paul and Jim make attempt on south ridge of Merhbani. Paul went down with stomach trouble and so they were forced to stop for 24hrs. Attempted to reach south ridge via a system of gullies on the west face. Retreated after 2 pitches due to

very poor conditions and objective danger. The route had effectively turned into a waterfall with high potential for stonefall.

- 9th-11th July: Rik and Dom made third attempt on the north-east ridge of North Twin. Reached approx 5400m before retreating due to poor snow and ice conditions.
- 12th July: Packed up base camp and moved down to Naltar Lakes, due to problems with some locals who had just moved into the neighbouring huts.
- 16th-17th July: Paul and Dom made successful ascent of peak just south of Khaitar. Approx 5100m. Possible first ascent. (This may be the peak christened Issa Peak by 1988 Shani Expedition).
- 18th July: Packed all our gear into a jeep and went back to Gilgit.
- 21st July: Expedition members go their separate ways - expedition over.

Expedition Background

This expedition started as all good expeditions do, in the pub way back in October 1989. Dom, Paul and Jim decided to do something a bit more interesting than just the usual run of the mill trip out to Chamonix. The most important consideration was to keep the cost down to a minimum. As none of us had ever been to the greater ranges before we also wanted to find an interesting area with peaks around 5000-6000m. We soon settled on Pakistan as there are no formalities or more importantly peak fees for climbing under 6000m. Next stop; the Alpine Club library to read previous expedition reports. We narrowed the choice down to the Hushe Valley, the Hispar or the Naltar valley and then looked around for more advice. This we got from Andy McNae and Jerry Gore at Cotswold Camping. Andy had been to the Naltar valley in 1988 to attempt Shani and told us that there was plenty of potential for first ascents and new routes in the valley. Somewhere during the course of summer 1990 I was left to organise the trip. Jim vanished to south east Asia for six months and Dom was supposed to be studying in France. We had agreed to go to Naltar in summer 1991 but had not yet decided upon our likely objectives. I borrowed some pictures from Peter Leeming, the leader of the 1989 Shani expedition and some from Andy McNae and decided pretty arbitrarily upon some objectives that I thought we might get up.

We felt that 3 was probably too few to take on a first trip and successfully persuaded Rik to come along. I now spent a little time writing a prospectus and drawing up a budget. I was off climbing in Australia and New Zealand at the end of October and so had a month to organise applications for money. We successfully applied for Oxford University backing and for grants from the BMC and MEF. Things were now quiet for the winter, well nobody was in the UK so its hardly surprising. I arrived back at the beginning of March just in time for an interview with the MEF. Things now began to move, I hunted out the best deal on the plane tickets, bought insurance and did all the 101 other little jobs that kept cropping up. We had decided to freight out some gear and food and fortunately Andy McNae offered to take it along with his freight (and that for Mick Fowler's trip). That considerably simplified life - all we had to do was deliver our three barrels to Manchester Airport and collect them again in Rawalpindi. All that was left to do was climb!

The Expedition

Rik, Jim and Paul flew out to Karachi on Friday 7th June with Gulf Air (good value at only £351 return). Dom had been in India and Nepal since February and was due to meet us in Rawalpindi. We arrived in Karachi and immediately lost our luggage to a hoard of porters. A taxi to the railway station cost us R150, rather over the odds but we hadn't yet worked the

relative cost of living in Pakistan. Next stop Rawalpindi; it took us about 4 hrs to buy train tickets and we eventually ended up with first class seats. Thus started the hardest part of the trip - we were unlucky enough to have arrived during a heat wave and the next day the temperature soared to over 50 degrees. Our train also managed to be 12 hrs late in arriving at 'Pindi taking nearly 40 hrs in total. We piled off the train absolutely shattered and were amazed to see Dominic walking down the platform to meet us. (He did however have good reason to find us, his total worldly wealth was about R200 (£5), to last him 6 weeks in Pakistan!). We checked into the Paradise Inn, the cheapest hotel we could find that had working air conditioning (R500 for the 4 of us).

We had several jobs to do in Rawalpindi and Islamabad; collect our gear from Mohammed Ali Changazi, get a helicopter bond and Chinese visas. Collecting the gear was no problem, it had all arrived in one piece. Getting a helicopter bond was more of a problem. Just before I left the UK I had been told by Roger Payne at the BMC that there was a new and free procedure for obtaining a bond. All we had to do, apparently, was collect a letter from Neil Jones at the British High Commission which would guarantee that we were insured for helicopter rescue, and take it to Mr Siddiqui at the tourism ministry. Neil gave us the letter, so far no problems.

The next day Rik and Paul applied for Chinese visas and then went to see Mr Siddiqui. Luck was not on our side, that night he and his family had been held up at gunpoint in their house and robbed of R500,000. As you can imagine he was not in a good mood and sent us away with a flea in our ear. He told us that the letter from Neil was not good enough as it did not state explicitly that the High Commission would pay for any rescue. Now started a farcical rushing between Neil Jones and Mr Siddiqui. We failed to get any joy on the helicopter bond front, and as we didn't have US \$4000 to deposit had to do without. We did however get invited to the High Commission Club in Islamabad for beers and a meal. This made up for all the day's hassles and we rolled home pretty drunk at 11:30pm. This was to be our last alcohol for 7 weeks.

We hired a cook, called Jahangir through Mohammed Ali Changazi and headed off to Gilgit the following day. Because we had so much gear none of the minibuses would let us on and we eventually travelled via Masherbrum Tours in a very overcrowded bus. We got to Gilgit at lunchtime and immediately went round buying food with our cook and organising jeep hire. After several sets of negotiation we hired Ishaq Ullah Baig, c/o P.O. Airport Road, Gilgit. With five passengers and a heap of gear we needed to make two journeys to Naltar and the final agreed price was R1000.

Naltar! After all the months of planning and organisation we finally reached the promised land. I was sent up first with Jahangir and the gear to organise porters. Jim, Rik and Dom imagined that I had got the worst deal, however I at least drove up in the cool of the morning - they had to suffer the rigours of the midday heat, 35 degrees or so and turned up looking as if they had been fried. Jahangir and I meanwhile sorted the gear in 25 Kg loads. If we were all prepared to carry that amount it left 11 loads to be portered up to base camp. Numerous porters appeared at the Prince Hotel, the centre of civilisation in Naltar and negotiations began. Initially the porters were demanding R150 a day. Eventually we settled on R100 per day and half wages for the return, i.e. a total of R300 per porter. They also agreed to provide their own food; most important as they will demand that you slaughter a goat for them at Naltar Lakes (which will cost about R600), we were able to resist this by pointing out that they had agreed to provide their own food. All was set for the following day or so we thought. As it happened all 4 of us went down with diarrhoea and we had to put the porters off for the day. The next day everyone was well except for Rik. The porters arrived with 4 donkeys in tow and loaded up all our gear. We left Rik behind and started walking at 7am. It took about 3 1/2 hrs to reach Naltar Lakes the overnight stop. We had problems with our kerosine containers leaking. Eventually they were loaded

onto a donkey as they don't complain so much. I dumped my kit at the lakes and headed back to see what had happened to Rik. He had managed to hire a porter for his load and was walking up very slowly, coughing a lot and feeling very weak. It took him well over 5 hrs to do the journey. The pair of us arrived at about dinner time, Rik immediately lay down in his tent feeling very ill. Jahangir cooked our first dinner of dahl and rice - I wasn't impressed, and the porters demanded that we sacrifice a goat to appease the weather gods. We refused this on the grounds that they had agreed to provide their own food. Rik's condition gradually worsened as the evening progressed until at about 10pm he decided that he was seriously ill. We consulted Peter Steele's book, 'Medical Handbook for Mountaineers' and diagnosed pulmonary oedema. We hadn't really considered this up till now as we were still at only 3100m. Anyway it was obvious that Rik needed immediate evacuation. Fortunately it is (now) possible to drive a jeep right up to the Lakes, and we had passed a jeep just 10 minutes down the track. Rik took some diamox which had a pretty immediate diuretic effect and was then escorted down to Gilgit by Jim and Jahangir. Jahangir stopped at Naltar but Jim and Rik carried on down to Gilgit. They had great difficulty in finding an open hotel at 3am, and were stopped at numerous checkpoints. Rik however was much better. The following day Paul and Dom waited at the Lakes for Jahangir and Jim, eventually we agreed to pay all the porters an extra R50 to wait for a day. The following day, Tuesday June 18th we finally reached base camp. The second stage was again 3 1/2 hrs, not very hard work for a porter with no gear! Jim arrived later that afternoon having walked all the way from Naltar in 7 hrs. It had taken us 11 days from leaving the UK to reach base camp (3500m).

Base Camp

The day we arrived was fine, a bit of sun and warm enough to try out my Australian solar shower. The following day bad weather set in, perhaps we should have bought and slaughtered a goat after all. It rained for six days which was not my idea of fun. Well actually it varied it a bit by snowing as well. As we had lost so much kerosine on the walk-in Dom was packed off back down to Naltar to leave some stuff for Rik and to buy another 20 litres of fuel. Eventually after a week the weather cleared up enough to go climbing.

Our first effort was to climb up to the ridge behind base camp, with a view to following it along to the summit of Snow Dome. We left at the ridiculously late hour of 7am. We rapidly ascended the lower slopes to reach the snow line. From here on life was much harder, the snow was very soft and progress was slow with the three of us taking it in turn to lead. The weather began to close in about 12pm, with a few light snow showers. We carried on to reach the ridge dividing the Naltar and Daintar valleys at about 1pm at approx 4800m. A mere 1 1/2 hrs later we were back in base camp supping tea. We estimated that it would take a further 3 hrs to reach the summit of Snow Dome from our high point, along an easy but corniced ridge. Back at base we found that Rik had arrived. Finally the whole expedition was together at base camp.

The following day was fine so after lazing around during the morning the four of us set off to attempt Sentinel, leaving at 3:10pm. We followed the valley up to Upper Shani and onto the slopes below the south face. We bivied at 6:30pm at the highest available water, at approx 4000m. Rik was still unacclimatised and had struggled to keep up on the walk-in. He therefore decided not to attempt Sentinel but to try a smaller peak just to the east of the bivi on his own. We cooked some very unappetizing half dissolved pasta and retired to sleep. Up around 2am and off by 3:15am. I had gone down with a dose of diarrhoea during the night, and was very weak, so I turned back after about 1/2 hr. Jim and Dom carried on to attempt Sentinel getting to within about 150m of the summit by 8am. By then however the sun had turned the snow

into mush and they were forced to retreat. Rik had ascended about 600m up his peak but retreated as he wasn't feeling too good. Everybody was back at base by lunchtime.

Back at base camp two weeks of rice, dahl and potatoes was driving me mad, so I volunteered to go back down to Gilgit to buy some vegetables and any nice food I could find. Base camp to Naltar took 5 hrs and I hitched a lift to Gilgit on a jeep. The following day I shopped in Gilgit and caught the cargo jeep back up to Naltar. There appear to be 2 jeeps a day from Gilgit to Naltar, but one of them only goes as far as Lower Naltar, 1 1/2 hrs walk down the valley from Upper Naltar (also called Dumial on some maps). We always found it extremely difficult to ascertain which jeep was going where and what time they were leaving. Anyway I was dumped in Lower Naltar with 70 kgs of food, whilst my porter was in Upper Naltar. I was forced to pay R200 to hire a jeep to cover the last 5 miles, the cargo jeep had only charged R35. I spent the next day walking back to base camp - 7 hrs with a donkey.

Meanwhile the others had been or were off climbing. Rik had made a solo ascent of the west face of Snow Dome. It had taken him 12 hrs up from base camp and then 2 hrs back down again. Jim and Dom had headed off to attempt the north-east ridge of North Twin, they had left very early that morning and weren't expected back for a couple of days. Despite Rik being extremely exhausted I managed to persuade him to make another attempt on Sentinel the following day. This time we left base shortly after 1pm, travelling very light. We had decided to climb during the night starting at about 10pm and so left our sleeping bags behind. We bivied just up from our previous site and cooked some tea. It was sufficiently cold to make the prospect of climbing very attractive and we managed to leave at almost exactly 10pm. The route was straightforward and we never bothered to rope up. I pulled a long way ahead of Rik and we ended up taking different routes to the summit, mine involved climbing over/through a 2m high cornice. I topped out just after dawn at 5am to beautiful views of Rakaposhi, Nanga Parbat and the Batura Wall. Rik finally arrived an hour later. The descent was very rapid - 1 1/2 hrs back to the bivi and then another 2 hrs back to base camp. All in all a fast and successful route, it had taken me only 60hrs to get from Gilgit to the summit of Sentinel (1400m - 5260m). Jim and Dom had preceded us back to base camp having made two unsuccessful attempts on North Twin, both foiled by poor snow conditions.

Next on our hit list was an attempt on Peak 5963, we had got excellent views of this from Sentinel and had found an easy if long route up the west ridge. Rik declined to come on this trip and remained at base camp. At 4pm Paul, Jim and Dom set off to bivi just beyond Upper Shani. To reach 5963 we had cross the ridge between the Naltar and Daintar valleys and then make our way up to the 4800m col at the foot of the west ridge of 5963. We were all suffering from a bad case of eggy belches and Dominic had to turn back back 1/2 hr after setting off. Jim and I climbed up into a snow bowl and then climbed easy slopes to reach the ridge at something over 5000m. I had been following a set of prints up these final slopes and down at the bottom we had a lot of feathers where a bird had recently been killed. Neither Jim nor I are expert naturalists but we did notice that the prints had no claw marks, like those of a cat - possibly a snow leopard if there are any left around there. We reached the col soon after dawn and looked across to 5963 and down below to the col we were aiming to reach. This was approx 250m below us and a little further up the mountain. I decided to attempt a direct downwards traverse to reach the col, and set off telling Jim to follow. I crossed some steep (50 degree) snow to reach an area of mixed ground. I down-climbed this, which was very loose and quite dangerous especially as the temperature rose to eventually reach the col at 7:15 am. I promptly fell asleep expecting Jim any minute. He finally arrived about 2 hrs later having decided that my route was too hard and dangerous. He had traversed along the ridge for quite a way until he was directly above the col, he had then had to down-climb some very

steep snow and loose rock. Neither of us much fancied a retreat by our routes. Shortly after 10:30 am bad weather came in. It soon started to snow and didn't let up for over 24 hrs. We sat at the col waiting hopefully for an improvement but none came, so at 4am (first light) we packed up and set off back to base camp. We decided to descend from the col down into the Daintar valley and hope to cross a pass back into the Naltar valley further down. For the first time we got out the rope as we had to pass a lot of crevasses in near white out conditions. We had a lot of trouble finding a pass since the ridge was very heavily corniced. Eventually we spotted what we hoped was a gap in the cornice and started up towards the ridge. Climbing uphill in driving snow, through knee to thigh deep soft snow was not my idea of fun. We soon got into a routine of leading for 250 steps and then following for 250 steps. It took us approximately 5 hrs to climb the 500m up to the pass at about 5000m. Here we were very fortunate to discover an easy snow slope all the way back down to Upper Shani. A quick glissade and back to our first bivi site for a brew. We got back to base camp at about 2pm.

Three days later on the 9th July everybody set out climbing again. Paul and Jim were hoping to climb the south ridge of Merhbani and Rik and Dom made a further attempt on North Twin. Our cook had gone down to Gilgit to get us some more food and fuel, and we had to wait his return at 12:45pm. Jim and I set off shortly afterwards and walked down the Naltar Valley until below Merhbani. We walked up the lower slopes, past a dangerous ice fall to reach a large snow bowl at the foot of the west face of Merhbani. We had previously been unable to see the whole of this face and were unsure whether there was a feasible route up to the south ridge from this side. However we had spotted a line of snow gullies and we hoped we would be able to ascend these. That night we set off at around 3am, however I felt very ill and had bad diarrhoea so we decided to rest for a day and hope I improved. That day we reconnoitred our route and counted at least 4 rock steps in our gully. Up again the following night at midnight and we set off for the face, we mistook a large crevasse for the bergschrund and were forced to retrace our steps to cross the bergschrund proper. We then traversed to the right hand side of the face and set off up the gully system. We climbed up the first short rockstep but were worried by all the sound of running water. I arrived at the next step to find a veritable waterfall. I belayed here and waited for Jim, climbing waterfalls in the pitch black was a bit more than we had expected, but I set off and led the pitch, about English 4b/c. At the top I got in a poor belay and looked up to see another bigger waterfall ahead. At this point Jim started to point out that this was in fact a very dangerous place to be, and that the route was much harder and longer than we had expected. Eventually I agreed to retreat and abseiled back down. During the abseil my anchor ripped out and was lucky to only fall 10ft and emerge relatively unscathed. By now I just wanted to get out of there, and we made rapid progress back to base camp arriving in time for breakfast. Back at base we discovered that the neighbouring huts were now being occupied by some locals. They were extremely unfriendly and told us in no uncertain terms to move our camp. We had two choices, either move the camp two hundred yards up the hill or to go back to Naltar Lakes and try some of the peaks around there. The allure of greenery and a beautiful lake proved too much so when Rik and Dom returned we sent Jahangir off to round up some porters. Rik and Dom had this time got to about 5400m on the north-east ridge of North Twin, but they had found very poor snow and ice conditions and so had decided that retreat was by far the most sensible thing to do.

Hence on Friday 12th July we packed up everything and walked down to the Lakes. This time there were 9 loads, each of which cost us R100. The walk down took only 2 hrs so we had plenty of time to set up camp. Naltar Lakes is a very beautiful spot, an oasis of trees and vegetation, a big improvement on all the moraine at Lower Shani. We had route food left for just one more trip, although we could have survived on local food. The next two days it

rained a lot, but Monday 15th July dawned fine. A lot of snow had fallen above 4000m so we decided to wait 24hrs for all the avalanches to clear before attempting a route. We had decided to climb the peak just to the south of Khaitar, this had looked feasible but impressive from higher in the valley and it now loomed over us. At 2pm the next day we set off to walk in to the bottom of this peak, reaching a bivi site by 6pm. Rik and I carried on a little further to reconnoitre the route. The route involved climbing a big couloir/face as high as possible, then breaking right to reach the north-west ridge and following this to the summit. We had previously been unable to determine whether it was possible to reach this ridge, but we spotted what we thought was a feasible route. The four of us set off shortly after 11pm, but Paul and Dom soon pulled a long way ahead, Jim was feeling ill and Rik who had aggravated an old knee problem decided to keep a slower pace with him. We crossed the avalanche debris at the foot of the slope and got into some avalanche runnels. These were of hard neve/ice, excellent for making rapid progress. I was in front and made the error, in the pitch dark, of climbing the wrong couloir. At about 2am I reached the top of the couloir and climbed up to what I imagined was the north-west ridge. I was a little bit upset to find we had climbed a subsidiary couloir and the one I had intended to climb was down to my right, separated from me by 10m of very loose and steep rubble. Jim and Rik were by now a long way behind. Dom shouted down to explain what had happened and then followed me across the rubble, this was fairly easy but extremely loose and I was glad to get down into the couloir. Dominic followed more slowly but eventually crossed the rock ridge and carried on up after me. Shortly before first light I reached the top of the couloir. I first waited for Dom to catch up and then for Rik and Jim. We saw their headtorches at the rock ridge but they had climbed still higher up the wrong couloir where it was even more dangerous to cross the rock ridge. They decided not to follow us and in the end retreated. Dom and I waited until it was light enough to see up to the ridge and then carried. We now crossed some deep and unstable snow and then climbed a short mixed pitch (Alpine AD) to reach the ridge. We followed this until 80m below the summit at the last snow patches. From here the rock deteriorates very badly and we were faced with a serious finish. We were just on the verge of retreating, but I decided to have a go without my sac or crampons. It turned out to be very similar to climbing a loose severe on the North Devon coast, without any belays. We finally reached the summit at about 5:30 am. Despite this peak not having a spot height marked it was definitely higher than Sasal Khand (5001m) and all the other peaks along the ridge to the south-east, it was not however as high as Khaitar (5454m & 5591m). My best guess for its altitude is between 5050m and 5100m. The descent of the loose rubble was even more frightening than the ascent, but we both got down alright. The rest of the route was straightforward to descend, only a short section of front-pointing was needed. We all met up again at the bivi site where Jim and Rik had stopped to cook breakfast. We then returned to Naltar Lakes and decided that that was enough climbing for this year. We packed Jahangir off to hire a jeep as we had discovered that this was a much cheaper way to get back to Gilgit. He turned up at about 9pm, with a jeep from Naltar. The cost for the trip from Naltar Lakes to Gilgit was R800.

We got up early and were packed and off by 8am, the jeep was very full and the track between the Lakes and Naltar is very rough. In fact we had two hold-ups, one to repair a bridge which had partially fallen into the river, the other to clear a very active landslide. It took us 6hrs to reach Gilgit and 'civilisation.' We checked into the Hunza Inn like all good expeditions and relaxed for a couple of days. Expedition over, we headed our separate ways. Dominic went back to the UK, the rest of us further north to Hunza and beyond.

Freight

As we were planning the expedition, one of the decisions to make was whether or not to take freight, and if so did we want to take gas. In the end we decided not to use gas stoves, but to rely on MSR XGKs so that meant no Dangerous Air Cargo (DAC). We did need to freight out some gear though, mainly because Dominic had left for India in February 1991 leaving us to bring out all his climbing gear. We also decided to purchase some food in the UK to use on routes etc. In the end we shipped 70 kilos of food and equipment. We were very fortunate to send it with Andy McNae and his Latok expedition, this relieved us of any organisation and in the end we just delivered the barrels to Manchester Airport and collected them again in Rawalpindi. A very satisfactory solution from our point of view. Many thanks to Andy McNae and in particular Carol who did all the hard work.

Transport

Our primary consideration in finding a flight was cost. The cheapest tickets we could find were from Gulf Air and cost £351 each return. (Romanian airlines, Tarom, do offer a cheaper ticket, but I knew too many people who had had a disaster with them to risk using this airline). This left us in Karachi. At Karachi we hopped straight on a taxi and were driven at breakneck speed to the railway station, Karachi Cantt. There is another station Karachi City but trains to Rawalpindi leave from Karachi Cantt. I met several people who had failed to discover this and had missed their train. The trains north are very slow, crowded and hot. It is only possible to book sleepers several days in advance so we travelled in 1st class seats. This was a nightmare, certainly the worst journey I have ever made, and not what you want on arrival in Pakistan. On the other hand it was cheap at only £8 each. I later travelled by 1st class sleepers and these are quite bearable, well worth the extra cost. Another point to note about Pakistan Rail is that it is possible to get a 25% discount (50% if you have a student card). To do this you have to get a concession form from the office of the Divisional Superintendent prior to buying your ticket, unfortunately you have to do this before every journey you make. The other option for travel to Rawalpindi is to fly PIA, we returned to Karachi this way and tickets cost R1725 (£43) or R1350 (£33) on the night coach (the flight that leaves at some unearthly hour in the night). It is possible (I think) to book these internal flights in the UK through PIA and if I was to go again I would book Karachi - Rawalpindi (Islamabad) before leaving the UK. It would probably cost slightly more to book the flight here, but it saves you any waiting in Karachi. Return flights can easily be booked in Rawalpindi. The cost, £350 London-Karachi and then £100 max Karachi - Rawalpindi is still considerably less than London - Islamabad direct. (I was quoted £650 by both BA and PIA).

We travelled by bus from Rawalpindi to Gilgit. This is again a dreadful journey taking from between 12hrs to 18hrs or more depending on the driver and landslides. We went by Masherbrum Tours and had to pay R180 each (this included a surcharge for having too much gear). It is marginally more comfortable to travel by minibus, however they would not let us on with all our gear. (Minibuses go from the Mashriq Hotel, Rajah Bazaar, the other buses run by NATCO and Masherbrum Tours go from the Pir Wadi bus station).

From Gilgit to Naltar we hired a jeep. For 5 of us and a lot of gear we needed two journeys and in the end one driver made the journey twice. It is very important to bargain extremely hard for your jeep, almost everybody was asking for at least R1200, one operator Pamir Tours wanted R1750. In the end we managed to get a jeep for R1000 with Ishaq Ullah Baig, P.O. Airport Road, Gilgit. We ended up by asking just about all the jeep owners in Gilgit to quote us a price. It is also possible to go by cargo jeep up to Naltar, these cost R30-R35 each but don't have very much room (one jeep that I travelled on had 24 passengers) and are consequently seriously uncomfortable. We later discovered that it is in fact possible to drive right up to Naltar Lakes so

halving the walk-in. You can also get porters up at the lakes but probably only about 10 or so.

Labour

We had decided to employ a cook for the duration of the expedition to make life more pleasant for us and to guard base camp when we were away. We hired Jahangir through Mohammed Ali Changazi of Himalayan Treks & Tours. We had been warned not to hire a cook in Rawalpindi, but to wait until we reached Gilgit, this in general is true as several people came up to us on the street and offered to be our cook. These guys are generally from Muree and are not used to or capable of cooking for expeditions. However our cook had several previous references from mountaineering trips and in fact turned out to be very good. We paid him R150 per day plus a return bus fare from Rawalpindi to Gilgit. In the end we hired him for 36 days and the total bill was R7000 (£175). I would certainly recommend having a cook if you could afford it, however we met several trips who were existing quite happily without one. He did however save us a lot of money on porters, food and jeep hire. He soon cottoned to the fact that we didn't have much money and always wanted the cheapest option.

We had some problems with our porters, but these were mainly of our own doing. In Naltar there is no difficulty at all in hiring porters, as soon as an expedition arrives you are surrounded by people wanting to be porters. By Pakistani government regulation porters are limited to carrying 25 kilos, therefore you must first divide all your gear into loads of 25 kilos. A spring balance is essential for this (can be bought in Gilgit). Once you've decided how many porters you need it is time to discuss wages. From Naltar it is one stage (ie 1 day) to the Naltar Lakes, and although this might take only 3 1/2 hrs you would have to pay more to get them to go any further that day. From Naltar Lakes it is one more stage to Lower Shani (again 3 1/2 hrs). Upper Shani is another stage on again, this time only about 1 1/2 hrs walk. We finally agreed on a rate of R100 per day and half wages for the return, ie R300 per porter. They had initially been asking for R150 per day. We later met several trekking groups and other expeditions, most of whom had paid R130 per day, some of them R150 per day. We were probably lucky to be the first group to arrive in the valley that year.

Our major difficulties were due to illness, first everybody went down with diarrhoea and we were forced to put the porters off for a day. This we did fairly successfully, then Rik suffered from pulmonary oedema on the first day of the walk in and had to be evacuated back down to Gilgit. As Jim and Jahangir went with him, we decided to wait at Naltar Lakes for a day. After much arguing and bad feeling we finally agreed to pay them R50 for the rest day, hence each porter cost us R350 in total. We had no further problems, although we were abandoned with all our gear on a flat piece of moraine beside the glacier. Although there is a pleasant flat grass campsite just up the hill, it is a lot more exposed though and we were glad of the added extra shelter at times. When it came to paying the porters they were very fussy about some of the banknotes and refused to take them. The bank will change them in Gilgit so it is worth checking that all your notes are in good condition when you get them. Also you must ensure that you have enough small change to pay all the porters (remembering the walk out too), as none of them will have any change.

Food

Ugh! Well what more can you say about Pakistani food. This was certainly the worst part of the trip. We had decided to rely on local produce for base camp food and initially bought a lot of flour, rice and dahl. I'm afraid after 2 days of chapatties, rice and dahl I'd had enough. We did in the end

go down to Gilgit (twice in fact) to buy fresh vegetables and other essentials. Breakfast usually consisted of chapatti or paratta (fried chapatti) with jam. It is worthwhile bringing out any favourite spreads from the UK eg marmite, peanut butter etc. Latter we took to eating porridge which was much better. It is also possible to buy cornflakes in Gilgit but the local powdered milk is unpleasant and it is hard to obtain fresh milk (although we were often given lassi). It is possible to buy eggs (not always fresh) from the locals (R2 each) so we often ate those with breakfast. Lunch could be quite edible at times, we ate a lot of eggs, potatoes and vegetables. On a couple of occasions we obtained some local cheese which was very nice made into a fritter with flour. Dinner was usually rice with something, often dahl sometimes potato curry. After we had persuaded our cook that dahl tested better with onions, garlic, tomatoes, spices etc it actually became edible if not appetising. You can buy pasta in Gilgit which is reasonable especially with a cheese and tomato sauce. Tinned cheese is available in Gilgit at R50 for a 300g tin (cheaper by R12 in Rawalpindi). It tastes a bit like Kraft processed cheddar (well in fact it is) and I thought it was excellent, some of the others disagreed. You can also get tinned fish, tuna, sardines etc but as this was a vegetarian expedition (well 2 of us are) we didn't have any at base camp. If I was going again I would stock up on tinned food in Rawalpindi, where its possible to get almost anything, even Mars bars. We also experimented with puddings of different varieties. On two occasions I tried to make an apricot pie but neither was very successful, however Dom became rather expert at making spotted dicks which went down very well with jam and dried fruit. We did all start to develop cravings for fat and sugar, hardly surprising considering our energy output. In conclusion make a real effort to get a variety of food and don't just trust your cook as we did to buy 6 weeks worth of dahl.

For route food we had brought out some dried food from England. But in fact we generally ate locally purchased pasta with soup from the UK. For breakfast we managed extremely well on porridge with added dried nuts and fruit. We hadn't brought out any chocolate bars but did have a large quantity of muesli bars. These went down extremely well. It is possible to buy snickers and mars bars in Rawalpindi, I couldn't find any in Gilgit, but they cost about R15 (38p) each. In Gilgit there are some local Pakistani chocolate bars available but try them first, we didn't like them very much. The other food we always carried was biscuits, we shipped out a lot from England but it is possible to buy good quality biscuits of numerous different varieties almost everywhere for between R8 and R15. It is also well worth buying some dried apricots and mulberries and also nuts, easily available in Gilgit.

Drink

We drank tea almost all the time, you can buy good quality Lipton's tea and Chinese green tea, our favourite. It is also possible to buy expensive tins of instant nescafe, so if you like coffee it might be worth bringing it with you. As for alcohol, none I'm afraid! Strictly speaking Pakistan is dry. However we did meet a Swedish expedition who had purchased some whiskey and other spirits in Flashman's Hotel, Rawalpindi. You can also apply for a liquor licence from the customs and excise. This entitles you to something like 6 litres of spirits a month. We also met a group from Durham who had brought along their homebrew kit, whether it was drinkable we never found out. You might also be able to import alcohol as part of your freight. We however survived the six weeks without touching a drop.

Equipment

We took out two MSR XGK stoves to use on routes. We initially ran these on kerosine, but had great trouble lighting them at low temperatures. To

overcome this we mixed in about 10-20% petrol. From then on we had no problem lighting the stove, but they did need pricking between each use and sometimes during use. Overall they performed quite adequately and I would use them again. We also had one epigas stove and purchased two gas cylinders from Hunza Handicrafts, Gilgit (in the Park Hotel compound). These cost R60 each (£1.50) and had been sold by a German expedition to the shop. The supply of gas is dependent solely on expeditions selling off unused canisters and hence is very erratic. We used the epigas on a later trek, mainly because it was then possible to cook in the tent.

We brought out with us some Trangia bowls and mugs to use on bivis and most important, a pressure cooker. All the rest of the cooking gear we rented from our cook, apart from a stove which we bought in Gilgit for R300. This gave us lots of problems, our cook spent half his days bodging repairs but it did just hold out for the full five weeks. If I was intending to stay longer I would buy two of these stoves.

One useful object we had was a solar shower. This is merely a 40 litre black plastic bag that you leave out in the sun. The water gets up to a reasonable shower temperature on a sunny day, even at 3500m. I bought this in Australia, whether they are available in the UK I don't know.

An essential thing to have is a large plastic tarpaulin to make a dining shelter, our cook had one that he had acquired from a previous expedition and he kept the one we brought out as well.

We all had separate tents and provided our cook with a large tent for his personal use and also to store food. Our cook had very little personal gear, we lent him a karrimat and sleeping bag as well as the tent.

We brought out a lot of climbing gear, especially rock gear but in the end used very little of it. We tended to solo our routes in pairs as the ground was usually easy (but not always) and even when pitching or moving together took very small racks to save weight. Almost all of the rock we climbed was very loose and shattered, often without any possibility of belay. We also had difficulties in finding any ice to put screws into, so usually we just climbed solo and unbelayed. We did in fact bring out 7 or 8 ropes to give us the possibility of using fixed rope if required. This never arose but we did all manage to sell off all our old and retired ropes for £15 each. We also sold a fair bit of other gear, a sleeping bag, some boots and a few odds and ends. Most of this was bought by the man at Hunza Handicrafts, but a rope and karrimat were sold to some rich Pakistani trekkers who came through base camp. In total we got over £100 for basically old and unwanted gear, after all who ever buys a second hand rope over here!

Money

We took with us sterling travellers cheques, which can be cashed at most big banks. It is possible to cash them in Gilgit but the rate was only £1=R38 compared to £1=R41 in Rawalpindi. It is also possible to cash notes on the black market, the rate was £1=R42.50 or so. For this little margin it is probably not worth the risk of being ripped off. Our cook was also asking for US dollars but we did not have any to change with him. We found our credit cards (Access and Visa) of little if any use. AMEX is more widespread, for instance PIA will accept AMEX but not Visa or Access. It is however possible to get a cash advance on Access or Visa at the Bank of America, branches in Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi. It is always worth having a lot of small change, people don't try to rip you off too much but if you haven't got the exact money it is not always easy to get change back again. Further north from Gilgit you can only cash travellers cheques at Sust. Life in general is very cheap, between the four of us we took £1700 out to Pakistan and this lasted for all the travelling we did after the expedition as well (3 of us stayed out until mid-September).

Weather Conditions

In general the weather was not as good as we had hoped for. Out of a total of 29 days spent at base camp, we had 12 days of bad weather. This tended to come in frequent spells for a couple of days at a time. After each spell we would have to wait 24hrs for all the avalanches to clear. During bad weather it would snow down to about 4500m, on one occasion it snowed at base camp dumping about 3 inches. We managed however to work around the bad weather and members were only caught out once in a storm. The major problem we had with the weather was the fact that it did not freeze very often and became far too hot during the day. We quickly discovered that it was only really possible to climb at night and a typical night's climbing was from 10pm to 8am. After 8am or so the snow became very soft and often dangerous. However on several nights it was not freezing even as high up as 4800m. Climbing at night also led to problems with route finding especially when we had a new moon. Resting during the day tended to be extremely unpleasant, as soon as the sun was up the temperature soared and we all had to take great precautions to prevent sunburn and eye strain.

Accidents and Illness

There were no serious climbing accidents and only one fall resulting in a couple of minor cuts. However, we all suffered from a variety of stomach and bowel problems. These were recurrent throughout the expedition and we never really managed to shake them off. (Surprisingly none of the members suffered as much from these complaints in the two months we subsequently spent in the region). On two occasions this type of trouble forced one member of the party to return to base camp and on another to rest for 24 hrs. It also made us weak, we all felt little if any fitter at the end of the expedition than at the beginning mainly due to being ill so often.

Much more serious was a case of pulmonary oedema that Rik suffered from. His symptoms started at the village of Naltar at approx 2600m. Because we were so low we failed to diagnose them here. The following day the expedition started the walk-in to Naltar Lakes. Rik was feeling too ill to come and said he would follow later that day. Paul dumped his load at the lakes and returned to the village to find Rik. Rik had started walking but was very weak and coughing a lot. Eventually we reached the lakes at 3200m. It had taken Rik 5 hrs, everybody else 3hrs. He immediately lay down feeling ill and coughing fairly continuously. By now it was obvious that Rik was seriously ill so we consulted Peter Steele's book, 'Medical Handbook for Mountaineers' and diagnosed pulmonary oedema. Fortunately there is a jeep track which ends ten minutes walk from the lake and also that night, a jeep. So Jahangir, our cook, Rik and Jim went back to Gilgit in the middle of the night. Rik made a full and complete recovery down at 1200m and returned to base camp a week later. He later went on to climb to over 5000m on three occasions with no serious altitude problems. However a month after the expedition, Rik and Paul trekked up the Biafo glacier, over the Hispar La (5100m) and down the Hispar glacier. Rik suffered from a second case of pulmonary oedema, the night after crossing the Hispar La. This time there was no jeep track and Rik was lucky to survive the three day walk out. The Hispar La must be one of the worst possible places to suffer from serious altitude problems as there are no short routes down to low altitude. None of the other members of the expedition suffered from any altitude problems at all.

Route Descriptions

Sentinel. South face. Grade PD. Vertical height 1200m (4000m-5260m).

Start from bivouac just above Upper Shani (4000m), where the highest running water is to be found. The route ascends the glacier descending from the south face, avoiding the crevasses on the left, then traverses below the central rock triangle to reach the upper face. Either climb the couloir to just below the summit ridge and traverse left below the summit rocks to top out from the west, or climb up trending left and cross a small cornice (2m) to reach the south spur. Follow this to the summit. Time 6 hrs in slightly soft snow. Could easily be climbed in 4-5 hrs in hard frozen conditions by a fit party. Descent by the same route. Serious risk of avalanches after heavy snowfall.

Peak to south of Khaitar. North face. Grade D (for dangerous). Vertical height approx 1100m (4000m-5100m).

Start from bivouac in cwm between peak and Khaitar. Route follows the central couloir up the face to reach the north-west ridge 100m below the summit. Climb this couloir/face, easiest following avalanche runnels (angle 40 degrees), and reach north-west ridge as high as possible - numerous choices of routes up to the ridge, generally mixed climbing at about AD for one pitch. Then follow ridge to the last snow patches. From here to the summit is 80m of very loose shale, extremely dangerous and not recommended. There are no belays and a rope will get snagged behind loose blocks. We soloed all the route and were not too happy descending this part. Time 5 hrs to north-west ridge, 2 hrs from here to the summit, total 7 hrs. Descent by the same route. Serious risk of avalanches after heavy snowfall.

Snow Dome. West face. Grade PD. Vertical height 1600m (3500m-5100m).

Follow shepherds' path SE from just below Lower Shani to reach the high pastures (maybe snow-covered early in the season). Then cross the snowfield to the snow ridge visible from Lower Shani. Walk up E to reach a large snow bowl below the west face, bounded by a sharp ridge on the right and a rocky ridge on the left. Four gullies descend from the ridge leading to the summit to this bowl, take the righthandmost of these gullies until forced left by a rocky headwall to enter another snowbowl. Ascend steeply for 30-40m. Trend left to gain ridge. Follow rock and snow directly above to reach the summit plateau. Walk easily to summit. Time 10 hrs from base camp to summit, descent 3hrs. Descent easier by one of the other gullies. Serious risk of avalanches after heavy snowfall.