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SHAWI NORTH FACE

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British Shani North Face Expedition 1992

Final Report (MEF Ref 92/34)

Members

Leader:Kathryn Phillips

Nationality:British

Age:27

Occupation:Geochemist

Kate has been climbing and mountaineering for just over 10 years. She is a keen rock climber and has made several visits to the bolted delights of France and Spain. She has climbed to E4 on natural gear in the UK and she aspires to climb Right Wall. Her mountaineering career began at university with winter trips to Scotland and a successful trip in 1985 to 6000m peaks in Peru. She was the first woman president of the Cambridge University Mountaineering Club. She reached 7000m on Shishapangma in 1987 before ever having visited the Alps! Since then, she has had several seasons (summer and winter) in the Alps with ascents including the Frontier Ridge (solo) and the Super Couloir in winter. She made the second British ascent of Ama Dablam (6853m) with Brendan Murphy in 1990. She will be part of the British expedition to Gangchempo (c6400m, Nepal) in March of 1993 and the British Gasherbrum IV expedition in June 1993. She is looking for an opportunity to attempt the first British female ascent of Mount Everest

Member:Brendan Murphy

Nationality.....Irish

Age:28

Occupation:Computer Scientist

Brendan has been rock climbing and mountaineering since 1980 with early experiences on Harrison's Rocks and in the Pyrenees. He has climbed extensively in the UK, Europe and Yosemite and occasionally wobbles up the odd E5. His Alpine career began in the early 1980s in Bregaglia with ascents of Cengalo and the Badile, followed by ascents of the Matterhorn (solo) and Route Major on Mont Blanc. He visited the Chogolungma and Haramosh area of the Karakoram in 1985 and made the first ascent of an insignificant 6000m hill christened "Aspirant Peak". Since then, he has visited Yosemite making an ascent of the Nose on El Capitan. In 1989 he made a 5-day winter ascent of the Eigerwand with Rob Durran, followed by an unsuccessful attempt on an unclimbed rock spire on the Biafo Glacier with Jerry Gore. The following year saw a successful ascent of Ama Dablam with Kate Phillips. In 1991, he spent 17 days on the north face of the unclimbed Cerro Kishtwar (6200m) with Andy Perkins getting to within 100m of the summit. He has since made a winter ascent of Divine Providence on Mont Blanc with Dave Wills. He will also be part of the British expedition to Gangchempo in March of 1993 and the British Gasherbrum IV expedition in June 1993.



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Objective

First ascent of north face of Shani Peak (5880m) in Naltar Valley, Pakistan.

Summary Timetable

10-Aug-92: Flight from Manchester to Islamabad.
11-Aug-92 -
12-Aug-92: Visit Himalaya Treks and Tours (run by Mohammad Ali Changazi) and collect flight tickets to Gilgit (pre-arranged by letter from the UK).
13-Aug-92: Flight to Gilgit. Buy Epigas, cooking equipment and basecamp food in Gilgit.
14-Aug-92: More shopping and packing in Gilgit.
15-Aug-92: Jeep ride (2 hours) to Naltar village. Hire 5 porters.
16-Aug-92: Day 1 of walk-in (1 porter stage): Naltar village to Naltar Lakes (3 hours).
17-Aug-92: Day 2 of walk-in (2 porter stages): Naltar Lakes to Upper Shani basecamp (6 hours). Kate falls ill with bronchitis. Establish basecamp (c4000m)
18-Aug-92 -
19-Aug-92: Brendan falls ill with bronchitis. Bad weather.
20-Aug-92; Weather improves; we do not.
21-Aug-92: Gentle walk up ridge behind basecamp to investigate the approach to Shani north face. Both of us very weak.
22-Aug-92: Weather breaks again. Another recovery day.
23-Aug-92: Start of a 4-day period of perfect weather. We make a carry of food and gear to a dump part way up the ice-fall en route to advanced basecamp.
24-Aug-92 -
25-Aug-92: Confined to basecamp by illness. Kate starts another course of antibiotics.
26-Aug-92: Start of our ascent of Sentinel. Bivouac below the snout of the small ice-fall on the south side of Sentinel. Lightning in the southern sky during the night.
27-Aug-92: Ascent of Sentinel (c5300m) via southern slopes leading to the E ridge (PD). Weather breaks.
28-Aug-92 -
29-Aug-92: Rest days in preparation for move to ABC. Improving weather.
30-Aug-92: Establish ABC in Upper Shani Basin at c4700m below NW face of Shani.
31-Aug-92: Consolidate ABC; collect gear from half-way dump. Weather deteriorates.
01-Sep-92 -
07-Sep-92: Recce approach to face and line of descent. Make two attempts on a mixed route on the NW face (estimated to be TD+), both of which fail before reaching

the bergschrund due to poor conditions (freezing level c6000m throughout the night). Weather persistently bad, culminating in an enormous dump of snow.

08-Sep-92: Evacuate ABC during snow storm.

09-Sep-92 -

10-Sep-92: Stranded at basecamp by heavy snow.

11-Sep-92: Evacuate basecamp through 1m snow carrying 30kg rucsacs. Reach Naltar Lakes.

12-Sep-92: Walk to Nomal. Hire 2 porters at Naltar village.

13-Sep-92: Cross Hunza river and return to Gilgit via KKH.

14-Sep-92 -

15-Sep-92: Stranded in Gilgit due to the effects of the bad weather that we discovered had caused a national calamity.

16-Sep-92 -

17-Sep-92: Epic bus journey back to Rawalpindi via patched-up KKH.

18-Sep-92: Stand-by return flight to UK courtesy of PIA.

Summary of the Climbing

The amount of climbing on the trip was seriously limited firstly by illness and then by bad weather. Our ascent of Sentinel was via the standard route (PD) following the easy south-east facing snow/scree slopes to gain the north-east ridge two hundred metres below the summit. Our approach to Shani ABC involved some tricky and dangerous ice climbing through the upper sections of the icefall leading to the Upper Shani Basin. We chose a direct route from our basecamp up the scree slopes of "The Rognon" and onto the snow fields on the true left bank of the aforementioned icefall. Unfortunately, the discontinuity of the snow slopes near the top of the icefall forced us to weave an intricate route through the last of the seracs. A longer but possibly easier approach would be to skirt around the north side of The Rognon thereby avoiding the icefall altogether. The Upper Shani Basin itself is heavily crevassed. We estimate that the bergschrund near the start of our proposed line is at a height of c4900m making the length of the route approximately 1000m. We estimate the difficulty to be about TD+.

Weather

We deliberately chose to delay our arrival until late in the season to avoid the intense heat and subsequent poor snow conditions that are prevalent from May until August. We suggest that this indeed is a sound tactic. We feel that if the weather had been less unsettled, we would have had every chance of being successful on our route which earlier in the season might have been a serious avalanche threat. Parties that have visited the area earlier in the summer have reported that climbing at night is the only safe option.

The weather was generally bad in the Karakoram during the 1992 season, and particularly unseasonal during September. However, it is our unscientific but heartfelt opinion that this area of the Karakoram gets more than its fair share of rainfall; we believe this to be the only rational explanation for the uncharacteristic lushness and greenery of the entire Naltar Valley! We suggest that its geographical location (in the extreme south-west of the Karakoram) makes it susceptible to bad weather.

Health

Both of us escaped gut infections except for a couple of 24-hour bouts of diarrhoea. We used iodine to purify our drinking water and bought Pakistani mineral water when staying in the towns. However, we both suffered from bronchial infections on the walk-in which we suspect that Kate had contracted in the UK. We treated this with a course of Amoxycillin. Kate subsequently suffered from Cystitis and Thrush which she treated as best she could by taking baking powder and using foot power.

Recent References to Shani Peak, Naltar Valley

Alpine Journal, Vol 90, 1985, p64: "Autumn in Shimshal and Naltar", Steven Venables. Steve Venables and Dick Renshaw attempted South Pillar on Shani in October, 1984, but were repulsed by bad weather.

Alpine Journal, Vol 92, 1987, p220: "Addendum to Karakoram notes", Paul Nunn. Roger Everett and Guy Muhlemann made the first ascent of Shani via the W ridge on 14th August, 1986.

Alpine Journal, Vol 94, 1989/90, p278: "Mount Everest Foundation Notes 1987-88", Edward Peck. Expedition from University College, London lead by Andy MacNae was foiled by bad weather attempting the unclimbed SE face during June and July, 1988.

Alpine Journal, Vol 95, 1990/91, p62, p262: "Shani, South-East Face", Peter Leeming. Duncan Francis, Martin Oakes, and Peter Leeming made the first ascent of the SE face and second ascent of Shani on 13th August, 1989.

MEF Report 91/43: "Oxford University Expedition to the Naltar Valley, Pakistan", Paul Drew. This team had intended attempting Shani, but were put off by bad weather and poor snow conditions during June and July, 1991.

Detailed Report

Background

Having had a successful and extremely enjoyable expedition to Ama Dablam in 1990, Kate and I were keen to attempt another mountain in the Greater Ranges. 1991 was a frustrating year for Kate: she was prevented from going on a trip due to the holiday restrictions imposed by her new job as a Research Assistant at Bradford University coupled with a bad knee injury caused by a skiing accident. Later that year, however, we began looking for a suitable objective for 1992. Lack of time was a major restriction as both of us have full-time jobs. Lack of money was also a factor!

After due deliberation, we finally opted to visit the Naltar Valley following recommendations from Andy MacNae and Rick Thomas. Andy had visited the valley in 1987 and made a number of first ascents together with an unsuccessful attempt on the south face of Shani. Rick had been out in 1991 with the intention of trying Shani but settled with ascents of a number of

neighbouring peaks. They both had photographs of the impressive unclimbed north face of Shani, and it was these that attracted us to the valley. Other factors in our decision to visit Naltar included the accessibility of the area from Gilgit (permitting a short trip with minimal portering costs) and the minimal amount of organisation and bureaucracy involved when climbing on a sub-6000m mountain in Pakistan (a truly enlightened policy).

Preparation

Both Andy and Rick had been out in Pakistan in the middle of the summer (May - July) and had reported very high temperatures and poor snow conditions during the day. Based on these stories and on my previous experience of weather in the Karakoram, we decided to postpone our visit until August/September in the hope that conditions might be more favourable later in the season. We were keen to avoid having to freight any equipment from the UK to minimise cost and to avoid delays in Islamabad waiting for clearance from customs. This raised the problem of gas: we wanted to use Epigas for cooking on the mountain, but it is not possible to carry gas in passenger luggage. Andy MacNae reckoned that we might be able to pick up Epigas or Blue gas in Gilgit. We decided, therefore, to take a multi-fuel stove (MSR) as well as Epigas and Blue gas burners.

Kate first sampled flapjacks from the Handmade Flapjack Company two years previously, and I too quickly became hooked. I brought a small number with me on our trip to Cerro Kishtwar (India) in 1991 and found them superb. Kate decided to write to the company requesting a discount on a more sizeable quantity for our Shani expedition and was kindly donated over 100 flapjacks by Martin Lambert. These became the core part of our hill food. We also brought a small amount of other goodies from the UK such as orange powder, Tartex paste, pate tubes, Marmite (see food list).

I first used Buffalo gear (Pertex covered pile) on Ama Dablam and found it extremely functional. Kate and I provided publicity photographs to its inventor, Hamish Hamilton, and we were both persuaded by him to get kitted out in Buffalo gear for Shani. We spent several hours one Sunday morning in Sheffield being measured up for salopettes, shirt and jacket only later to discover that Hamish was donating them to us for free.

I had made two previous visits to Pakistan. On the first visit, we bought cheap tickets to Karachi on Syrian Arab Airlines and took the train (second class) to Rawalpindi. On the second occasion, we bought similarly cheap tickets on Air Kuwait but took the internal PIA flight to Islamabad. On this occasion, we decided to pay the extra money and fly direct to Islamabad partly to save time but mostly to save hassle. British Airways offered the cheapest tickets (£495) with the bonus of an extra 10kg baggage allowance each in both directions kindly granted by Lisa Brown at BA Customer Relations.

We also decided to pre-book the PIA Islamabad-Gilgit flight since this can get very busy. It is possible to do this from the UK, but the price is rather high. Instead, I wrote to Mohammed Ali Changazi and asked him to book tickets on our behalf. After a small service charge (£6), this still worked out cheaper than booking from the UK.

Approach Journey

On Monday 10th August we checked in at Manchester Airport with 65kg of hold luggage and about 10kg each of hand baggage; our excess baggage allowance was vital. Kate had the brilliant idea of stocking up with masses of chocolate from the Duty Free shop; this is an excellent way of getting around the weight restrictions that otherwise apply to hand and hold luggage. We had a comfortable 7.5 hour flight to Islamabad, arriving very early Tuesday morning. We took a non-air-conditioned room at the Pine Hotel for Rs300 (£1 = Rs47.5); prices had risen considerable since my last visit in 1989. This turned out to be a mistake on two fronts: we found it too hot during the day and night to cope without air-conditioning (we ended up paying an extra Rs150 per day to have the air-conditioning turned on!); we felt that the Pine Hotel was over-rated and over-priced (the Hotel Holiday just up the road is similarly priced and is far better value for money). The taxi ride from the airport cost Rs100.

Tuesday was spent visiting Nasir Ali and Himalayan Treks and Tours (a colleague of Ali Changazi) and collecting our return flight tickets to Gilgit (costing Rs550 each), buying some cool Shawal suits (35 degrees centigrade during the day), wandering around the bazaars and meeting a friend of mine, Mahboob Siddiqui who did his PhD at Loughborough at the same time as me and now works for the Pakistani PTT. Our Gilgit flights were for Thursday, so we had a lazy day on Wednesday changing money and trying to keep cool. In the evening, we met some English climbers, Bob and Victor, who were the advanced party for Mark Miller's expedition to Nanga Parbat; Victor and Mark were tragically killed some six weeks later in the PIA Kathmandu air crash.

We had no problems checking in our baggage on the Gilgit flight despite being well over our weight allowance. In any case, the excess baggage fee on this flight is very low. We had a superb early morning flight with views from the cockpit of K2, Nanga Parbat, Haramosh, etc. We checked in at the New Golden Peak at the far end of town near the Polo ground for Rs130 for a double room. The owner is very friendly. The other Golden Peak hotel is also supposed to be very good. The weather in Gilgit was a pleasant contrast to Islamabad. We started buying our food and equipment. We had no trouble buying Epigas; there were perhaps 15-20 250g cans in town. There was also stacks of Blue gas. There is a new climbing shop near the NATCO bus station which sells and rents a limited amount of gear such as tents, jackets and sleeping bags. It is possible to buy almost any type of food in Gilgit except chocolate and powdered potato.

The following day was a Friday and Pakistan's Independence Day; we were confined to Gilgit by the festivities. The atmosphere in the evening was tense due to the threat of violence between the rival Shiite and Suni groups; fortunately, the strong military presence seemed to avert bloodshed on this occasion. Saturday was our planned day for leaving for the mountains. We spent the morning buying the rest of our supplies. We were persuaded by Ali, the hotel owner, to take his brother Basharat as a guide. No fee was agreed (a mistake on our part); we were assured that we could pay whatever we could afford. Basharat was an amiable young student who had no experience in the mountains but who wanted to improve his English. He was keen to stay with us and act as cook and basecamp guard, but we decided that his complete lack of equipment and suitable clothing meant that he would have to return with the porters. Despite

what we had heard, we also suspected that we could survive in the valley without a basecamp guard. Basharat's translation skills proved to be useful on the walk-in, but in retrospect we could have survived perfectly well without him. We hired a jeep for Rs800 for the 2 hour journey to Naltar village. En route, we filled a good quality Korean chemical container with 5 litres of petrol mixed with 10 litres of kerosine for our MSR X-GK II basecamp cooker. This proved to be an effective mixture and the quantity proved ample for our 3 weeks at base camp.

We arrived at Naltar at 4pm having driven through some very heavy rain and checked in at the friendly but bug-ridden Prince Hotel at Rs75 per room. We were very impressed by the beauty of the valley - very reminiscent of an Alpine valley with pine trees, beautiful grass, cattle, and snow-capped mountains. It proved to be a pleasant contrast to the Chogolungma and Biafo-Hispar areas that I had visited before. We signed up 5 porters to carry our gear for Rs140 per day and half-rate for the return journey. The walk-in to Upper Shani is 3 extremely leisurely porter stages. We had a brief encounter with Dai Lampard who was returning from an unsuccessful attempt to recover the body of a British climber who had been killed on North Twin during the previous year. He was interested in our photographs of Shani and recommend a route on the left side of the NW face that we later decided was suicidal owing to avalanche danger.

The next morning our "porters" arrived and proceeded to load our gear on 3 donkeys. This was not entirely unexpected since we had heard that donkeys are used extensively in the valley (the terrain is extremely easy), but it annoyed us intensely that we were paying these men to walk unladen. I instructed Basharat to convey our dissatisfaction to the head porter telling him that never in Pakistan had I paid so much for so little! Unfortunately, the beauty of the valley has made it very popular with western trekking parties and prices are correspondingly high. Compared with the Balti porters, these men are very disappointing both in terms of their friendliness and their ruggedness.

Approach

The first day of the walk-in (Sunday 16th August) comprised a four hour walk to a very pleasant campsite by the Naltar Lakes. There was a little rain during the night. The second day was slightly more arduous because we wanted to cover the two remaining stages to our basecamp in a single day. The porters understandably wanted an early start so that they would have time to return to their villages before dark. By mid morning, we had passed the last summer settlement (where we managed to hire a tarpaulin) and soon got to above the tree line. The walking is very easy up ablation valleys on the true left bank of the glacier. Kate, however, was finding the going anything but easy because she was suffering from influenza-type symptoms and was feeling weak and nauseous. I was forced to leave her just above the Shani pastures (the end of the second stage) so that I could guide our porters to the site of our basecamp.

By mid-afternoon, the weather had closed in and it was quite cold and wet. I managed to persuade our head porter to continue to the far end of the Upper Shani pasture (another lush ablation valley) so that we could set up camp at the foot of a prominent moraine ridge bounding the true right side of the main valley leading to the Pakora Pass. There we found an idyllic

spot next to a freshwater spring, just as we had been promised by Dai Lampard. I paid off the porters and erected the tarpaulin over some boulders that had obviously been used as a kitchen shelter in the past. I then left Basharat to pitch his tent while I returned with a stove and some food to coax Kate the remaining few miles to basecamp. After a brew on route, we were all united at basecamp by the evening of the 17th August.

Illness at Basecamp

It rained continuously for the next two days. Kate became quite ill, and before long I was suffering from the same symptoms. We diagnosed some sort of chest infection which we treated by both taking amoxycillin. We felt very weak, and spent the entire two days lying in our tent, only emerging for the occasional brew. In the meantime, Basharat was getting rather disillusioned with life in the mountains, and rather wet into the bargain. We had loaned him our brand new Mountain Gemini single skin Goretex tent which was entirely unsuited to the English-type weather. Basharat could not understand why we had spent so much money on a tent that leaked in the rain!

We had decided on the first day that we would pay off Basharat, primarily because three people at base camp would have been a crowd and an unnecessary expense. Furthermore, he was totally unprepared for the conditions, and only survived the two days of rain by us loaning him some of our spare clothing. He was unhappy at first about not being allowed to stay up, but soon changed his mind after the bad weather. The morning of Thursday 20th dawned fine, and Basharat prepared to leave. There was an unpleasant tension in the air, however, which we knew concerned his payment. Despite his assertion in Gilgit that we could pay him whatever we could afford, it transpired that he was expecting Rs300 for four stages up, Rs150 for four stages down, and Rs150 for the two days that he had spent at basecamp! After a rather heated discussion, we convinced him that the two days he had spent at basecamp had been for his benefit and not for ours (he was merely sitting out bad weather and eating our food to boot) and we eventually settled on a payment of Rs1850. We parted on good terms in the end, although Kate and I felt that we had paid an excessive amount for his services (although well below the standard Naltar rate for a guide). We also arranged that he would come back on the 8th September with a donkey and donkeyman for the walkout.

Friday 21st August was another fine day, although we were both still too weak to be able to take full advantage of the weather. Instead, we went on a gentle walk up the ridge behind our basecamp to get a better idea of the lay of the glacier at the foot of the NW face of Shani. We also got excellent views of the Twins and Sentinel, although the view of Shani was blocked by the massive rock Rognon that marks the true left side of the steep icefall that falls chaotically from the Upper Shani Basin. Dai Lampard had told us that the best approach to the face would be to go right around the Rognon and come in from the east. This seemed rather crevassed and circuitous to us, and we decided to explore a direct route up the side of the Rognon thus bypassing the icefall on the (true) right and approaching the face from the west. There was a little rain in the afternoon. A possible carry to the Upper Shani basin was mooted for the morning. Showers during the night and morning, however, deterred all thought of activity and we had another lazy day.

First Carry to ABC on Upper Shani Basin

Sunday 23rd August was the first day of our longest spell of settled weather (four days). We were up at 6am and away (later than planned) by 9am for a carry up the Rognon. We had some difficulty crossing the moraine ridge just above our camp, but we were established at the foot of the Rognon by mid morning. A rock band slowed progress up the Rognon giving some quite sporting climbing with heavy rucsacs. The slopes above were very easy and it appeared that our route would indeed give us fast access to the Basin. We dumped the gear at the start of some snow slopes very near the top of the icefall and were back at basecamp by 6pm. It was great to be getting out and about at long last and to be feeling a good deal more healthy.

Kate had a bad night with dehydration and cystitis, so we shelved plans to have a crack at our acclimatisation peak, Sentinel, and have (another) rest day instead. The weather was glorious and we took the opportunity to sharpen our ice tools and have a good wash. The extra rest day was probably sensible since we were both still quite weak. This was my 29th birthday. We were both still feeling rough on the following morning, so decided to postpone our departure for yet another day. By Wednesday 26th, however, we decided we could delay no longer.

Acclimatisation on Sentinel

We set off in the early afternoon for a bivvy at 4500m on moraine near the foot of a tiny hanging glacier coming off the south-east face. We approached from the south up the true left bank of the main valley leading to the Pakora Pass. We were treated to excellent sunset views over Shani and the Twins, although the site of high cirrus and lightning during the night was somewhat disturbing.

I missed my 4.30am alarm call and we did not surface until 6am. We were greeted by clouds streaming in from the west. We had a quick breakfast and set off up the moraine to a snow field on the true left hand side of the glacier snout. We then went straight up the middle of the (dry) glacier, although it would have been easier to have traversed to the true right bank. We gained the upper snow field above the hanging glacier and crossed this to the prominent moraine slope leading towards the north-east ridge. The conditions were very poor - wet snow and bad weather - although the climbing was straightforward if a little dangerous in places. We reached the summit at 2pm via a scary final snow arete leading to the summit tower. The low cloud robbed us of what would otherwise be fine views of the surrounding peaks. The descent was much more rapid and enjoyable than the ascent, and involved "skiing" down moraine slopes for much of the way. We were back at basecamp at 6.15pm and cooked a wicked meal. We treated ourselves to a rest day on the 28th.

Attempt on Shani

Saturday 29th dawned fine but soon clouded over. We spent the day washing and preparing our equipment for our attempt on Shani. The following morning we made an early start and quickly reached our gear dump high on the Rognon; we were both feeling much stronger than

on the previous trip up the Rognon. The weather was fine. Unfortunately, however, progress above the dump turned out not to be as easy as expected. Although we had managed to bypass 90% of the icefall, the snow field that we gained above our dump petered out before reaching the Basin. We were forced into the icefall and spent a worrying few hours establishing a precarious route onto the glacier above. I was overjoyed when Kate discovered the key to the route that gave us access to the Basin. We floundered across the snowed-up glacier in hot sunshine, ever mindful of crevasses. We set up ABC at the base of the Rognon on the true left bank of the glacier where there was a little melt water coming off a high snow patch.

We were very optimistic at our chances as the route appeared quite feasible; we reckoned that we could climb much of it during the night and reach the summit within 24 hours of leaving ABC. The start of the route took a 100m vertical ice wall at the foot of the massive gully that splits the face and runs diagonally from right to left almost directly to the summit. The gully would be dangerous in poor snow conditions, but appeared to be quite consolidated at this time. The ice wall at the start of the route appeared to offer the technical crux.

On Sunday 31st August, we dropped back down to our dump to retrieve the remains of our gear and food. The following day was spent making a recce of the face and the descent. Everything we saw convinced us that the project looked quite feasible. Unfortunately, however, as we approached the bergschrund that night the conditions were not good; poor snow (too warm) and lightning on the horizon. We beat a hasty retreat after a rock avalanche off the face swept our tracks.

Sure enough, the weather closed in that night and we were completely storm-bound for the following two days. During this time, the face erupted into a massive series of avalanches sweeping the line of our intended route. It was a very sobering sight.

In the afternoon of 4th September the weather appeared to be clearing and we were hopeful that we would be allowed another crack at the face before being forced to head for home. The evening was clear and cold for the first time in days. We decided to make another attempt the next evening if the weather held. Once again, however, the weather deteriorated during the night and we awoke the next morning to more steady snow. The following day was still poor, but seemed to be the last chance we had for a summit attempt before going down to meet our porters at basecamp two days later on the 8th September. We decided, therefore, to have one last look at the route. We set off during the night but once again turned back before even reaching the bergschrund because of the bad snow conditions.

Despite our rapidly approaching rendezvous with the porters, we decided to stick around the next day (7th September) just on the off-chance that we could have one very last attempt at the route if the weather picked up! Success seemed to be so close at hand, and we were worried at the prospect of bailing out just a day short of a settled spell of good weather. That afternoon strange high cirrus started streaming over from the south-west and it was soon snowing hard. The route was now completely out of the question and we resigned ourselves to descent on the following day.

Return to civilisation

It continued to snow hard during the night and it was still snowing heavily in the morning. We resisted the temptation to wait until it stopped, reasoning that the descent would be getting increasingly difficult. We packed up our ABC in driving snow and proceeded to stagger in a semi-whiteout for home. By the time we had abseiled through the ice-fall and reached our dump, we were both cold and tired. The snow slope just below the dump turned out to be extremely dangerous owing to a thick covering of fresh powder over old neve. At one point, Kate nearly pulled me off my stance and into the crevasses below as she unexpectedly started to slide while I was taking her off belay because the rope had run out. It was all rather fraught and we stopped for a brew in appalling conditions to restore our strength. The once easy slopes of the Rognon were now covered in a thin layer of wet snow and we were forced to abseil with our heavy sacks down the rock band. We were extremely glad to arrive at basecamp (which was below the snow-line at this time) just before dark. The Buffalo gear functioned extremely well in these conditions.

The temperature dropped further during the night of the 8th September and it dumped 1.5m of snow at basecamp during the following two days. Our time was spent repeatedly digging out our tent and kitchen tarpaulin; we set the alarm during the night at four hour intervals in order to ensure that we could keep the snow at bay. It later turned out that this bad weather was affecting a large part of Pakistan and caused extensive flooding and loss of life. We were very glad to be off the hill. Not surprisingly, there was no sign of our porters.

On 11th September it finally stopped snowing and we were faced with the prospect of dismantling our basecamp and fighting our way to Naltar village without porters. Our return flight to the UK left Islamabad on the 15th September and it was beginning to look doubtful that we would make it. I abandoned some of my gear but was unsuccessful in persuading Kate to leave behind her (totally ruined) tent! The following morning we staggered down the valley with very heavy rucksacs through deep snow. At Lower Shani we met a worried looking shepherd who was trying to round up the surviving horses and cattle; the locals had been caught unawares by the unseasonal weather and many of their livestock were lost. We made a contribution by herding a young bullock most of the way down to Naltar village. Fortunately, after a few miles we hit a trail forged by the Yaks that had already been herded downhill and progress was much easier. We just made it to Naltar Lakes before dark.

The following morning (12th September) we arrived at Naltar to be told (as we had feared) that the jeep track to Gilgit had been destroyed. Eager to make our international flight, we hired two porters and persuaded them to leave almost immediately for Nomal. On the way down we saw the destruction that had been reaped on the road and crops. On arrival in Nomal we learned that the Karakoram Highway was also blocked meaning that there was no chance of making our return flight. We spent a memorable evening at the home of our Ismaili porter eating local food and fruit.

We finally arrived in Gilgit on the 13th September to scenes of near panic from groups of western tourists who had been stranded for almost a week. No flights were leaving owing to the state

of the runway, yet there was still an enormous waiting list. We spent the time rediscovering the joys of civilisation and waiting for the KKH to be fixed.

We eventually got back to Islamabad on 17th September after an epic journey on the first NATCO bus to leave Gilgit after the storms. I spent the entire 22 hours awake sitting next to the driver feeding him regular supplies of cigarettes; this, apparently, is the duty of the front seat passenger. The following couple of days were spent trying to eke out our money while making regular journeys to the airport trying to get a UK standby flight. PIA finally came to our rescue and we arrived back in the UK on 19th September, only three days later than planned.

Budget

Expenses

UK food:.....	£95
Medical:.....	£50
Mountaineering Equipment:	
Mountain tent:.....	£250
MSR XGK-II stove:.....	£99
Snow stakes:.....	£25
Miscellaneous:.....	£12
Total:	£385
Film:	£97
Pakistan visas (x 2):.....	£70
Flight tickets (x 2):.....	£980
Insurance (x 2):.....	£198
Pakistan expenses:	
Kitchen equipment:.....	Rs1500
Basecamp food:.....	Rs1600
5 porters plus guide (walk-in):.....	Rs5000
2 porters (walk-out from Naltar):.....	Rs1400
Gilgit flight tickets (x 2):.....	Rs1390
Jeep to Naltar:.....	Rs900
NATCO bus back to Pindi:.....	Rs314
Rent of tarpaulin:.....	Rs825
Clothes:.....	Rs1000
Epigas:	Rs980
Petrol/kerosine plus container:	Rs270
Taxis:	Rs1200
Hotels:	Rs2400
Restaurants:.....	Rs2000
Souvenirs and miscellaneous:.....	Rs3900
Total:	£520 (£1 = Rs47.5)
Grand Total:.....	£2395

Income

MEF grant (Alison Chadwick Award to Kate):.....	£500
BMC grant:.....	£300
Individual contributions (x 2):	£1600
Grand Total:	£2400

Food

UK Food

Handmade flapjacks	50
Tartex vegetarian pate	4 tubes
Primula cheese spread	4 tubes
Chilli puree	2 tubes
Marmite	1 tube
Creamed coconut	1 block
Herbal tea bags	150
Custard powder	6 sachets
Milk powder	200g
Burgamix	1 packet
Dried bananas	1 packet
Sweets	5 packets
Packet soup	5 pints
French/Italian herbs	1 packet
Appeal Orange powder	6 packets
Bulgar wheat	500g
Stock cubes	12
Hot chocolate	20 sachets
Cup-a-soup	20 sachets
Instant noodles	5 packets
Instant mashed potato	5 packets
Chocolate bars	20
Muesli bars	20

Pakistan food

Porridge	(3 packets, 6 double servings per packet)
Nestle's milk powder	400g
Sugar	1 kg
Lipton tea	1 box
Green tea	1 box
Nescafe coffee	2 small tins
Ovaltine	1 tin
Swat Honey	2 tins
Salt biscuits	5 packets

Sweet biscuits	5 packets
Dean's cheese	7 tins
Mustard	1 jar
Ketchup	1 jar
Macaroni	4 boxes
Tomato puree	5 small tins
Salt	1 kg
Baking powder	1 small tin
Rice	2 kg
Flour	1 kg
White dahl	1 kg
Red dahl	0.5 kg
Vegetable oil	1 litre
Assorted packets of spices	
Potatoes	1 kg
Onions	1 kg
Garlic	0.25 kg
Turnips	0.5 kg
Carrots	0.5 kg
Beans	0.5 kg
Colrabi	0.5 kg

Contents of 2-man hillpacks (of which we had 10)

Herbal Tea Bags	6
Hot chocolate sachets	2
Cup-a-soup sachets	2
Chocolate bars	2
Muesli bars	2
Flapjacks	2
Noodles or smash	1 packet
Sugar	8 sachets
Porridge mixed with milk powder	1 sachet
Custard	0.5 sachet, in heavy packs only
Primula	0.5 tube, in heavy packs only
Orange powder	0.5 sachet, in heavy packs only
Biscuits	1 packet, in heavy packs only

Basecamp Equipment (purchased in Gilgit)

Metal trunk plus padlock	2
Good quality chemical jerry can (for fuel) ..	1
Cheap jerry can (for water)	1
Pressure cooker	1
Large pan plus lid	1
Tea strainer	1

Ladle	1
Large bowl for washing	1
Funnel for fuel	1
Detergent for washing-up	1
Tarpaulin	1
Toilet paper	4 rolls
large Spoons	2
Cotton sacks	2

Medical Equipment

Flagyl (antibiotic)	1 course (15 tablets)
Amoxycillin (antibiotic)	2 courses (15 tablets)
Erythromycin (antibiotic)	1 course (15 tablets)
Codeine Phosphate (cough suppressant).....	25 tablets
Stemetil (anti-nausea)	20 tablets
DF118 (pain-killer)	20 tablets
Temazepam (sleeping pill)	20 tablets
Distalgesic (pain killer)	20 tablets
Paracetamol (mil pain killer)	50 tablets
Nurofen (pain killer)	10 tablets
Andusol (indigestion pill)	20 tablets
Canestan (anti-thrush)	2 tubes
Antiseptic cream	1 tube
Electrolade	10 sachets
Ear/eye drops	
Iodine tincture	30 mls
Plasters, Bandages, Dressings	
Blister kit	
Syringe, needles, scalpel blades	

Assessment of the Expedition

Despite failing at our objective, the expedition was an enjoyable experience for us both that passed without serious incident. It was proof to us both that a two-person team can operate successfully in the Himalaya with the very minimum of support (no cook, sirdar, etc) and at a relatively low cost. However, such a small team would be in trouble in the event of an accident to one of its members.

The Naltar Valley is quite unlike any other climbing area that we are aware of in Pakistan; it is more like a Swiss Alpine valley than the sort of high-altitude desert that characterises much of the rest of the Karakoram. Furthermore, access from Gilgit is extremely short and simple. These attractions, together with the abundance of sub-6000m peaks, make Naltar an ideal venue for trekkers and climbers who are looking for a gentle introduction to this part of the Himalaya.

The drawbacks, however, stem from these self-same attributes. The Naltar Valley is relatively popular compared with the vast majority of the Karakoram; those looking for a true wilderness experience will be disappointed. Another consequence of its popularity is that porter prices are relatively high; the rates are similar to other parts of the Karakoram, but the stages are short and sufficiently gentle to allow donkeys to be used for all the hard work.

Most of the more accessible peaks (Snow Dome, Merhbani, Shani, North and South Twins) have already been climbed, but some of the more remote peaks (beyond the Pakora Pass and in the Daintar Valley) appear to be still virgin. The number of technically demanding routes is rather limited. We judged that many of the easier routes would be dangerous in poor snow conditions. The quality of the rock is very poor.

Recommendations to Future Expeditions

The direct flight from London/Manchester to Islamabad is more expensive than flying via Karachi but, based on past experience of both the internal rail and air links, was considered by us to be infinitely preferable.

We got excellent value BA tickets (cheaper than PIA) from **Nahl Travel, 124 Roundhay Road, Leeds, LS8 5NA**.

We used Himalaya Treks and Tours to book our internal flights from Islamabad to Gilgit for a small service charge. This is much cheaper than booking these flights from the UK. Himalaya Treks and Tours are at **112 Rahim Plaza, Murree Road, Rawalpindi**.

It is often possible to buy Epigas or Blue gas in Gilgit. There are two outlets: **Hunza Handicrafts** (in the grounds of the Park Hotel) and a newly opened climbing shop not far from the NATCO booking office. We brought burners for both types of gas cylinder from the UK.

We used an MSR XGK-II stove at basecamp burning a 2:1 mixture of kerosine and petrol.

It is not necessary to hire a guide in order to climb or trek in the Naltar Valley. It is very easy to hire porters in Naltar village.

In our experience, it is not necessary to have a basecamp guard. We stored our food in lockable metal trunks (bought in Gilgit) to safeguard it against animals. We hid our valuables under boulders whenever we were away from basecamp.

It is possible to buy many pharmaceuticals (antibiotics, pain killers) over the counter in Rawalpindi and Gilgit at much lower prices than the UK.

There is a good selection of western food in Gilgit (except chocolate) which obviates the need to transport large quantities of food from Rawalpindi.

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our special thanks to **Hamish Hamilton** for kitting us out with his full range of **Buffalo** mountain clothing. Hamish has developed an integrated system of outdoor clothing made from Pertex-covered pile which is light, warm, windproof, and extremely fast drying.

We would also like to thank **Martin Lambert** from the **Handmade Flapjack Company** for donating several boxes of his truly excellent flapjacks which can be purchased from good health shops.

We would like thank **Lisa Brown** from **British Airways** for giving us each an extra 10kg baggage allowance for both the outgoing and return flights.

A horizontal number line starting at 0 and ending at 10. There is a tick mark at 5.

