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BRITISH ULTAR 1 EXPEDITION 1994.

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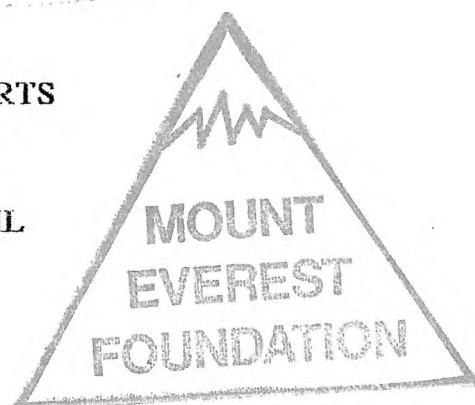
SNOWDON MOULDINGS

TRAILWISE

VENTURA

BIBLER

Mr BILLY SQUIER



Expedition members:

Julian Freeman-Attwood

{ Forester }

Caradoc Jones

{ Marine Biologist }

Ed Webster

{ Mountain writer /photographer }

Steve Reid

{ Climbing shop owner. }

Cover picture: Ultar from the Cenus'hidden' Valley.



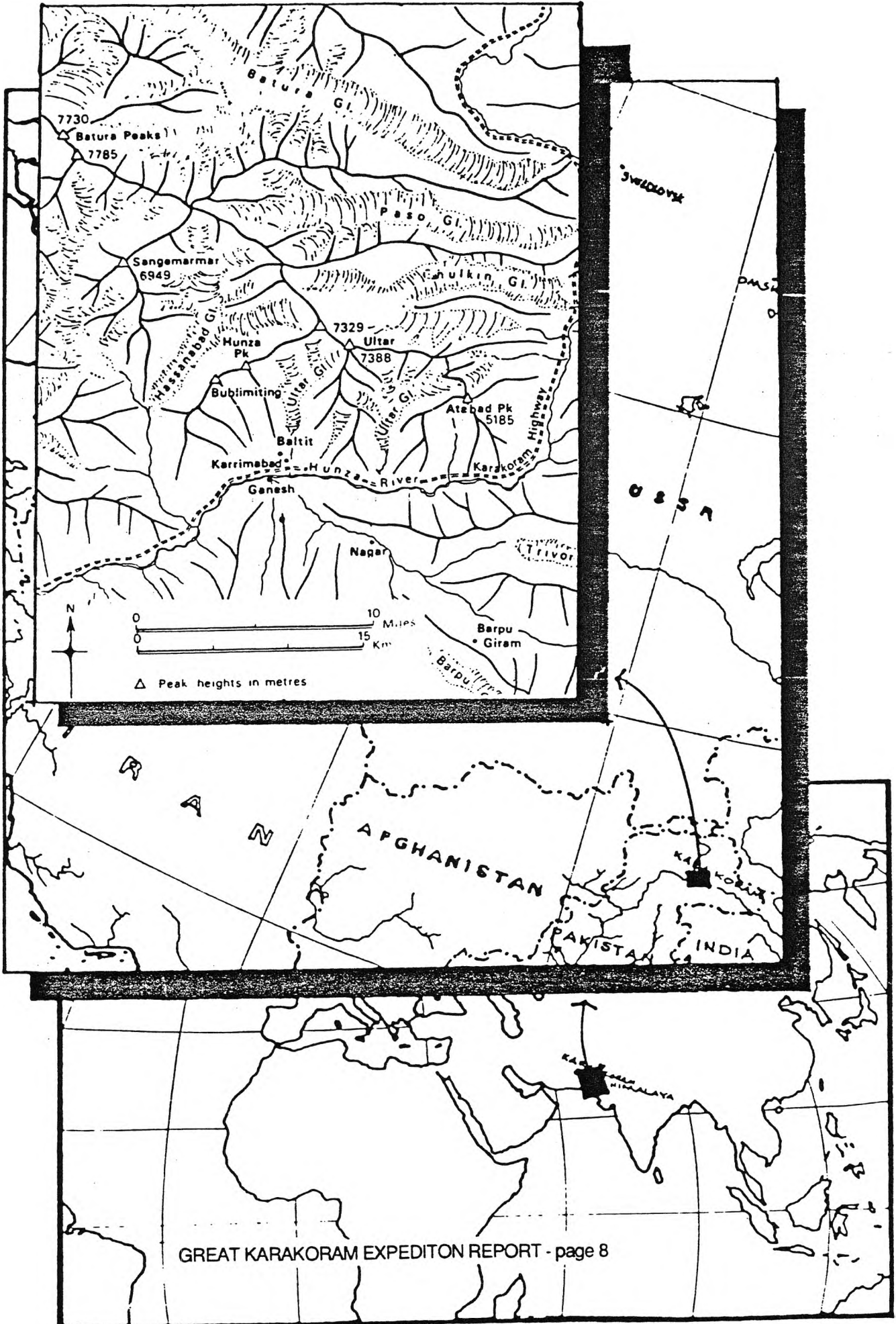
EXPEDITION TEAM:-

Julian Freeman-Attwood Forester, 39yrs. Previous experience:- New route TD Kilimanjaro, Mt Kenya west ridge, Ruwenzori's Mt Stanley and Baker, East face Shishapangma (Tibetan 8,000m peak), leader of Karakoram snow lake 1988 expedition, leader Antarctic 1990 expedition that made three first ascents, leader Outer Mongolia 1992 (with Ed Webster) with new route on highest peak, leader 1993 Masagang expedition to Bhutan, Winter ascent Mt Blanc in European Alps, leader 1994 of mountain / sailing expedition to Antarctica from Tierra del Fuego, east face of Catinaccio in Dolomites, rock climbing to Extreme severe 2 (E2) and ice to scottish grade 5. Attempt on Ultrar 1 in 1991 with C.Jones.

Caradoc (Crag) Jones. Marine Scientist, 34 yrs. previous experience:- 1st ascent Hunza peak in Karakoram, 1st British ascent Biblimotin, New route Kilimanjaro, Diamond couloir Mt Kenya, solo 1st ascent east wall Peneto in south America, ascents in Torres del Paine and Tierra del Fuego (Mt Sarmiento), Mt Paget in South Georgia Antarctic, Ak Su Ranges Turkestan, / alps Mt Blanc, Mt Rose, Grand Jorasses, Dru couloir and Courtes in European Alps, rock climbing to E4 and ice to scottish grade 5. Attempt on Ultrar 1 in 1991 with J.Freeman-Attwood.

Ed Webster. Mountaineer and photographer, 37yrs. Previous experience: New and innovative 1st Ascent rock routes in Colorado, Black Canyon, Yosemite, and Canada including many ice routes in North America; 1985 American west ridge Everest expedition to 24,500ft ; 1986 Everest north face to north col then 1st solo ascent and east face variation on Changtse ; 1988 Everest Kangshung Face, new route to 28,730ft without oxygen ; with Julian Freeman-Attwood in both Mongolia and Bhutan 1992 and 1993.

Stephen Reid. Climbing shop owner. 39yrs. Previous experience:- 6 summer and 3 winter Alpine seasons. Bonatti Pillar/North face Tour Ronde in winter/Forbes arete in winter/North face Droit in winter/ east face Requin/east face Moine/Innominata ridge Mt Blanc/south ridge Dent Blanche/Dauphine Alps/Has climbed every route in 'hard rock'. Grade to E2 5c/Ice to scottish grade 5.



ULTAR 1

Ultrar 1 (Pk 35 on the old Karakoram survey) is, at 24,235ft (7388m), the highest and most attractive unclimbed peak of the Ultrar group, which is in itself, the highest unclimbed group in the Karakoram and now the second highest unclimbed massif in the world. This may seem odd because the summit of Ultrar is less than 3.5 miles from the road, the Karakoram Highway. But the vertical interval is so great that the summit is also 3.5 miles (17,000ft) higher than the road. Since 1986 there have been 13 attempts to climb the mountain by expeditions from Japan, Germany, Norway, Spain, France and Britain. (Two of the 1994 expedition members, Freeman-Attwood and Jones, attempted the peak in 1991.) Most of the attempts have tried the south side of the mountain whereas the north side, despite repulsing two expeditions, might have held the key to success. It is to this north side that we looked first.

We failed to find a route in the north, and reverted instead to one of two routes we attempted in 1991, namely the SE ridge valley or 'hidden valley'.

THE JOURNEY OUT

The expedition arrived in Islamabad on 10th June 1994 and spent the next five days buying equipment that could not be purchased in the northern territories. We also had meetings at the Ministry of Tourism to finalise formalities, picked up 9 sealed drums of food, gas and equipment air freighted from Britain and were introduced to our liaison officer, Mr Shams-ul-Qadir.

On the 15th June we started early up the Karakoram highway. After a brief stop on the 16th in Gilgit (just north of the Gilgit/Indus river confluence) to buy fresh vegetables, we arrived in Gulmit to the north side of the Ultrar massif.

THE GULMIT GLACIER RECCE

The Gulmit and Ghulkin glaciers run parallel to each other with the heads of both glaciers being fed by the northern slopes of Ultrar and Bojohagur. We had made a recce in 1991 as far as the first Gulmit ice fall and this time pressed on to put a camp above the first ice fall with the assistance of 8 porters. It looked like there was a feasible ridge on Ultrar starting at 5,000m albeit above a second ice fall. We forced a way up this to 4,600m towards what looked like a plateau (later confirmed from Ultrar's east ridge) but the glacier was so broken that any idea of load carrying through it had to be dismissed. Furthermore, as the season progressed, the snow-bridges would become even more precarious than they already were and there was considerable danger from avalanches, some of which had been too close for comfort as it was.

We therefore retreated and turned our attention to the south side of the mountain but not at all regretting the time spent looking up the Gulmit glacier which very nearly yielded a route and which had anyway assisted us in acclimatisation. This recce had been part of our original plans but realistically we had never considered there would be more than a 50/50 chance on the Gulmit.

THE 'HIDDEN' VALLEY/ CUNUS AND SIKARDU GLACIERS.

From Ahmedabad we decided to return to the hidden valley, which we had found the way into in 1991 with Saunders and Sustad. The one known quantity was a route they tried to the right of the prominent S.E. pillar. First though, to get into the valley is no easy matter with several steep rocky cols to negotiate all at around 4500m amongst a cluster of 5500m granite spires. These sections had to be fixed for the porters. Everything in the Ultar region, as we were to find out or be reminded, is in an advanced state of decay resulting in a myriad of rock and ice avalanches.

It must be said that we had a considerably troublesome and unhappy time with our porters amongst whom deceit seemed to be a virtue. A day's work sometimes entailed no more than a three hour stage and they refused to take the normal 25kg load, instead trying to insist on 15Kg loads. Even after a deal was struck and a paper signed, there was endless bickering and argument. Our liaison officer did the best he could but by the time we got into the hidden valley we had all had enough. Despite being a day's carry from base camp, we sent all but two porters home and were frankly glad for the ensuing peace and quiet. The two we kept, Arif and Sultan, were stalwart fellows and over the next 3 days they helped relay all our gear to base.

The site of base camp was half way up the Sikardu glacier and a good deal higher, at 4,600m, than the 1991 camp. The camp was on a moraine at the confluence of the Sikardu and an un-named glacier falling from Ultar's east ridge. The site was blessed with two fine glacial lakes which proved to be warm enough for swimming!. We also had the added advantage that our very affable liaison officer was prepared to double up as a cook; and a very talented one at that. A liaison officer cum cook must be somewhat of a first in the Karakoram.

FIRST FORAY ONTO THE MOUNTAIN.

In 1991 Saunders and Sustad had started their route from low down on the Cunus glacier just opposite Ultar's great SE pillar. We had found a higher col linking up with their route but saving us at least 400m of climbing. (SEE PHOTO). Webster, Jones and Freeman-Attwood left on 10th July gaining the col and continuing across an un-named glacier to the west of Sarujet Sar (a subsidiary summit on Ultar's east ridge.) Reid at this stage was injured due to a fall in the cols the day before when he managed to pierce a hand quite badly with his ice axe.

We ascended the true right bank of the un-named glacier gaining a snow rib and camp site at about 5,000m and just below a feature we were to call 'lower pt 5 gully'. The next morning we left at 2am (all climbing on Ultar has to be done at night due to appallingly hot day conditions), turning the gully on the left through steep mixed ground over which we temporarily left two ropes. The ice, as we found on the rest of the mountain, was 'boiler plate' hard and Jones did a fine grade 5 lead through another gully, upper pt 5. This gained us the long traverse section which was as far as this first recce was designed to go.

Even the traverse section was steeper than it had looked from below and we could now get a view of what we were to call the 'left slanting ramp'. Ramp is a

misnomer as the route looked like 65% hard grey ice for probably 8 to 10 pitches. Webster and Freeman-Attwood didn't much like the look of the possible objective danger although Jones seemed less perturbed by this. We abseiled down to the last camp (including a horrifying overhanging ab from upper pt 5) where we stayed for two more snowy and blustery days during which it would have been unsafe to continue down, as there were avalanches coming down the glacier below. When we did start down we retrieved the two ropes left over lower pt 5 since this feature looked like it could be outflanked if this route was later adopted.

A somewhat unpleasant retreat across the glacier and 2 more abseils got us to base on 13th July.

GULMIT TOWER

The weather continued bad for two more days during which we decided that to further acclimatise we should try to climb the unscaled Gulmit Tower c.5,800m.

The tower is a dramatic feature especially when seen from 3,000m below in Gulmit or from the Karakoram Highway. The top of the Sikardu glacier, which is quite crevassed in it's middle section, gives way to a 50% slope to a col at 5,300m directly to the NW of the tower. Like all other slopes on Ulta there was a distinct lack of neve, and hard ice meant that on most of it we either pitched it or moved together with runners between us. Again the job was done at night as a continuous barrage of golf ball sized ice rained down from 7am onwards. A very good camp site was found at the col with absolutely spectacular views to the north and east.

Half of the 500m height gain to the summit looked straight forward from below. This was not the case. Jones and Reid started at 10pm on the 19th July attempting a slightly different route from Webster and Freeman-Attwood who started at 3am.

The first pair found very loose and dangerous rock (like most of the granite in the valley) and had only achieved 1/3rd height after 11hrs of hard climbing. The second party found an easier way albeit with some aid climbing to a point just below Jones and Reid but again, horrendous loose boulders (reminiscent for Webster and Freeman-Attwood of Mongolian boulders!) meant it was not too difficult to decide to go down. We had also made the mistake of thinking we could climb the Tower in a day when two would have been more realistic. Abseils and downclimbing put us back on the col. Whilst it would have been good to 'tick' Gulmit Tower, the outing had achieved it's purpose of acclimatisation especially for Reid who did not go on the first recce. A further 6 abseils and downclimbing put us back on the Sikardu glacier.

THE ATTEMPTS ON ULTAR

JONES AND REID'S ATTEMPT ON THE SAUNDERS / SUSTAD ROUTE. (by S.Reid)

Our route followed a line attempted unsuccessfully by Saunders and Sustad in 1991.

We left base camp about midnight on 26th July and climbed the initial snowfield followed by the steeper unnamed glacier and a slight descent to camp 1 on a snow spur arriving about 4am. Trying to sleep during the day was made difficult by the almost constant noise of rockfall and avalanche.

On the 28th we again climbed during the night and spent a long time outflanking lower pt 5 gully to the left which involved a trying descent of several hundred feet followed by numerous pitches of 50% hard ice and one technical rock pitch near upper pt 5 where camp 2 was established on a small overhanging rock ledge just big enough for the Bibler tent. As we had been on the move for 12 hours we decided on a rest day. During that day the snow slope next to camp 2 turned into a waterfall and the tent was hit by a few lumps of stray ice.

On the 29th we left camp at 6pm and immediately traversed 400ft left to gain a vast snow basin. The traverse was on steep and hard ice covered with a little mushy snow but, once reached, the basin provided easier climbing despite route finding difficulties in the dark. There were still occasional rockfalls and at one point both climbers were hit by debris from an explosion of rock on the cliffs above, fortunately suffering nothing more than a severe fright.

The entire basin (circa 1km across) had to be traversed from right to left and downward several hundred metres until a breach in the bergshrund (up to 50 meters high in places) could be found. This gained us the start of a vast couloir (the 'left slanting ramp'). Initially, good neve made for rapid progress but after 4 pitches hard black ice made progress slower and more tenuous. By now it was 7am and with the greater part of the ramp still to come and with small stones and ice starting to fall, haven was sought on a promising looking ledge on rocks to the left. This, however, proved to be illusory as the ledge turned out to be a steep arete of hard ice which was hit by stonefall while we were examining it. Further left a shallow and very uncomfortable niche provided shelter from the bombardment for the rest of the day. During this time there was an almost continuous fall of stones ranging from tiny to the size of TV sets combined with perpetual slush avalanches on the ramp. Many of the stones fell close to the climbers who were fortunate in having stumbled on the only area of shelter that could be seen. At this point Reid felt it to be suicidal to continue and although Jones was willing to risk going on, as he felt that the nighttime freezing would stabilise conditions, a retreat back to camp 2 was started as soon as it was cold enough (10pm). This was accomplished by abseils down a loose rock gully and a return across the snow basin. By the time camp 2 was reached both climbers had been without proper sleep for 40 hours. The following day they descended to Base camp without incident.

THE ATTEMPT BY WEBSTER AND FREEMAN-ATTWOOD.

The two set off on 25th July up the Sikardu glacier (much crevassed in its middle section) to the bottom of the slope leading up to Gulmit Tower. We had left some equipment and food at a cache (4800m/15750ft) en route back from Gulmit Tower 4 days before and were rather alarmed to find that the slope up to the tower had been swept comprehensively by stone fall. Happily it was not the route we now intended to try which was a glacial route to the left and back up right eventually joining Ultar's east ridge which we then intended to make our way along. (SEE PHOTO.) The route looked rather simple but turned out otherwise.

Starting at 2am on the 26th in bright moonlight we made our way for some time up easy ground until stopped by a massive crevasse stretching completely across the glacier. We climbed down into it and were able to make our way along the bottom for 150 meters before climbing out on the top side. This led on easy ground to a sharp right in the glacier and a good site for camp 1 on a shelf at 5300m/17650ft. Thus far took 6 hrs so we arrived at 8am and, (as was the case on the whole trip), stayed put for the entire sweltering day whilst the mountain as usual began falling apart. We were not in fact threatened here but avalanches descended the gully to our right.

The next section looked straight forward at 50% and would have been had there been any cover, except a bit of slush, on the boiler plate hard ice. Starting off again at 2am it took us 5 hours to do the next 1000ft with hard and tiring front pointing and hanging belays the entire way. It was probably the hardest easy-looking route in the world. We found a camp 2 at 5650m/18500ft under a vertical ice wall and above a cluster of tottering seracs which periodically took a quick trip down to the Sikardu.

On the 28th July we started at midnight up a natural 45% break through the ice wall and made it to a bergshlund at the beginning of another steep section. Nevertheless, poor looking weather was coming in from the Rakaposhi direction so we decided to stay put at camp 2.

The weather in fact held and the next night (29th) we again started at midnight. There was only one place to get through the bergshlund and that required a couple of grade 5 moves expertly executed by Webster although we had to sack haul. We were then back onto continuous 50% and a short section of 60% hard ice. The trouble was that had we known there would be so little neve we would have brought more ice screws. One titanium one had already bent leaving us with 5 total. This meant that with 4 used up (two at each end) as belays, that left just one runner in a 50m pitch which, with 20kg sacks, was not the most soothing way to climb. After 12 hrs climbing and this time in the heat of the day we reached the east ridge at 6,000m/19700ft. This was corniced over the north face and we couldn't find any good place to camp. We continued up in horrendous and totally protectionless steep sugar snow (our least favourite of ground) to about 20,000ft but finding no better camp site we returned to c.6,000m. Here we dug out a platform only 5ft from a cornice!(SEE PHOTO) and knocking in some snow stakes we tied ourselves in with boots, crampons and jumars also tied in in case of waking up hanging over the north face and Gulmit glacier. Gulmit village itself was a spectacular 3,000meters below. We could also confirm that there was indeed a plateau, which we had tried to get to on the Gulmit Glacier recce, below a north face Ultar route but as previously stated we had been unable to force the ice fall. We also had spectacular views of Lupghar Sar, Momhil Sar, Trivor and Khunyang Chish to the east. Diran and

Rakaposhi to the south and a myriad of scattered six thousanders towards the Wakhan corridor to the north.

The next day(30th) we stayed put for a rest and came to the conclusion that, this being the sixth day out, we in fact had very little chance of achieving Ultar. We did have a chance of Sarujet Sar (a not very prominent point on Ultar's east ridge) but Freeman-Attwood felt that with such little ice screw protection the next even steeper section was unjustifiably dangerous and as we were agreed that the main prize of Ultar was out of reach the drive and impetus to continue on difficult ground had diminished.

At 3am on the 31th (our 7th day) we commenced abseiling. Belayed down-climbing for two pitches and an unpleasant ab from a poor ice screw gained us a steep rock rib from where rather better protection could be placed. A further 5 abseils and 2 more pitches of down-climbing delivered us to camp 2.

The next day (1st Aug) we were again up at 2am for 5 more abseils and 1 pitch of downclimbing getting us to camp 1. We continued down to the Sikardu completing camp 2 to ABC and on to Base camp in just 7 hours.

METEOROLOGY

In general we cannot pin our failure on poor weather but rather on the excessive heat. The Karakoram is of course an arid region in the rain shadow of the Great Himalaya but Freeman-Attwood and Jones thought there was certainly more rockfall and less snow cover in 1994 than in 1991. On many nights the climbers were woken up 5 or 6 times by the sound of rockfall on a fairly impressive scale. There may be a case for attempting Ultar earlier in the season but we thought we were going early enough by arriving at the beginning of June. On many peaks you could arrive perhaps in May but on Ultar it may not be possible to get into the Hidden Valley that soon. The Ultar nullah route might at that time be better and more accessible.

The Freeman-Attwood / Webster route would be worth considering by future parties as it was objectively safer than the Jones / Reid route but the former route requires a longer section of the east ridge to be negotiated.

The only other route attempted this year was by the Japanese trying the south ridge integral from Altit. They did not succeed on the route and sadly one team member was killed when a rope was severed by stonefall.

ENVIRONMENT

At the end of the expedition all cardboard and paper was burnt. Any tins or other non-burnable items including the residue from the fire was made up into a porter load and removed down to Karrimabad. No rubbish was crevassed.

As we were an Alpine style expedition, no ropes or debris was left on the mountain except of course for ice screws or wired nuts at abseil points.

DIARY

10th June	Arrive Islamabad
11th to 15th	Islamabad and Rawalpindi
15th/16th	Journey along Indus to Gilgit and on to Gulmit
17th	At Gulmit
18th to 24th	Gulmit Glacier recce (north side)
25th to 28th	Transfer to Ahmedabad, arrange porters
29th June to 6th July	Loads in to Hidden Valley
7th and 8th	Relay loads to Base Camp
9th	At Base
10th to 13th	First foray onto mountain
14th/15th/16th	Bad weather Base Camp
17th to 20th	Gulmit Tower
21st to 24th	Bad weather Base Camp
25th July to 1st Aug	Both attempts on Ultar
2nd to 8th	Pack up Base and out to Karrimabad

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FOUNDATION FOR SPORT AND THE ARTS

We were immensely grateful for the generous support from the Foundation. We are of course sorry we could not have brought back the prize of Ultar's summit but such is the nature of mountaineering and of Ultar in particular. British mountaineers hope they will continue their support for worthy climbing projects in the greater ranges.

MOUNT EVEREST FOUNDATION AND BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

We would like to thank the foundation and council for their support. That thanks comes especially from Freeman-Attwood and Jones who have now been on 2 MEF supported Ultar expeditions.

KRONOSPAN

We thank Mr Martin Kaindl and Dr Woods for the generous support from Kronospan Ltd.

MARKS AND SPENCER

The food we were allowed from the London Marble Arch branch was of outstanding quality and we were especially glad of the vacuum packed meals which were entirely edible at 20,000ft where nausea usually takes over to some extent.

We thank Sir Richard and Lady Gabrielle Greenbury for their generosity in arranging the above, along with Mr Barry Hyman (corporate affairs).

Dr MARK UPTON

Our thanks to Dr Upton who, as a specialist on mountain medicine, provided a comprehensive medical kit.

SILKING

Our thanks for 1st quality silk long johns, tee shirts and gloves.

**DB MOUNTAIN SPORTS ,FIRST ASCENT, LYON EQUIPMENT,
SNOWDON MOULDINGS, TRAILWISE, VENTURA.**

Our thanks to all the above firms for giving or allowing us to purchase at trade a variety of mountaineering equipment.

MACPAC

Our thanks for the supply of superb South-col pure goose-down sleeping bags.

BIBLER

Our thanks to Todd Bibler for supplying these fine mountain tents through Ed Webster.

Mr BILLY SQUIER

Our sincere thanks to Mr Squier for his extremely generous cash support.

ACCOUNTS

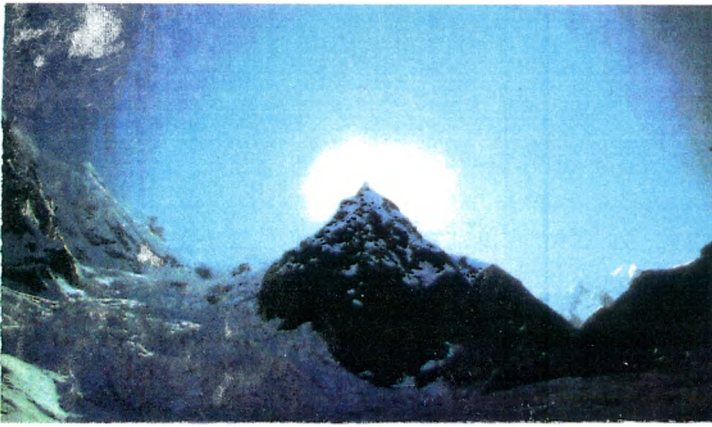
EXPENSES

Peak permit	£1341
Environmental fee (Government non refundable)	£133
Air fares (4x£599)	£2396
Visas	£76
Food UK	£122
Food PAK	£306
Medical	£129
Insurance (4x£189)	£756
Air freight (out and return plus haulage)	£1001
Accommodation Pakistan	£526
Road Transport PAK (Hired bus to Hunza and Jeeps)	£592
Porter wages (Gulmit recce plus Hidden Valley)	£1680
Porter Insurance	£60
Base Camp hardware, primuses, cook tent etc	£305
Nazir Sabir agency fee plus PAK customs charges	£350
Liason Officer pay	£480
Liason Officer gear	£309
Ropes, Ab tat, replacement of lost hardware, batteries	£482
Travel expenses (Jones prior to expedition)	£34
Telephone and faxes	£150
Administration (prior to expedition)	£350
Production and distribution of report plus photostats	£300
Interest and overdraft fees	£114
Bank commission on expedition Travel cheques	£50
TOTAL	<u>£12042</u>

INCOME

The Foundation for Sport and the Arts	£6000
The Mount Everest Foundation	£1100
The British Mountaineering Council	£1100
Kronospan Ltd	£300
Mr Billy Squier	£2866
Member's contributions (4x£169)	£676
TOTAL	<u>£12042</u>

(Conversions worked out on the basis of £1 = US\$ 1.5)



Upper Gulmit ice-fall.
It was not possible to get porters through
in order to attempt the left skyline ridge.



Rakaposhi north face from Ultar.



Ultar east ridge.
Webster at camp 3. At back left is
Karen Koh and Gulmit is 3,000m below.



Ultar south-east face.
Jones and Reid route
marked to high point.



Ultar east ridge (Sikardu).
Webster climbing steep ice
en route to camp 3.



Ultar from the north.
Arrow marks Webster/Freeman-Attwood
high point and summit further right.