

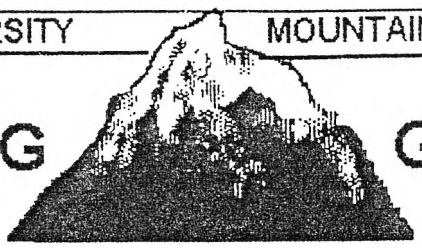
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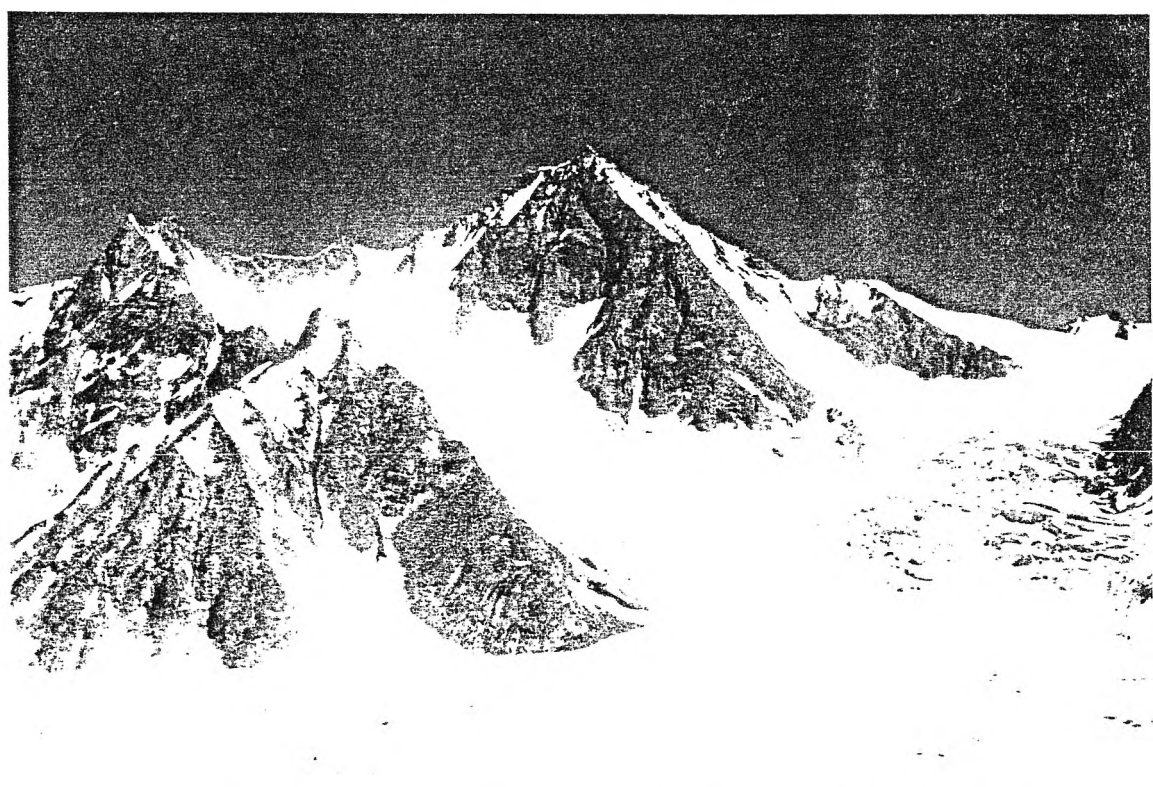
MOUNTAINEERING CLUB

SIM GANG



GLACIER

EXPEDITION '94



Above photo: Our objective 5800m peak on the Sim Gang Glacier



+623



An official Durham University Sporting Expedition

DURHAM UNIVERSITY

# Acknowledgements

The expedition would like to thank the following people for their generous support:

**British Mountaineering Council  
Data Connection  
Mr and Mrs Dunsmore  
Durham University  
Grey College  
Grey College JCR  
Grizedale College  
Hogg Insurance  
Mount Everest Foundation  
Rowntree Macintosh  
Royal Society of St George  
Tarmac Construction  
Twinings  
Yorkshire Tea**

# Contents

		Page Number
1	Summary	2
2	Personnel	2
3	Planning and Fund Raising	3
4	Transport	3
5	Medical	4
6	Weather and Specialist Equipment	4
7	Porters and Other Staff	6
8	Climbing	6
9	The Bear	8
10	Accounts	9
11	Useful Addresses	10

# 1. Summary

The expedition aimed to make first ascents of two unnamed sub 6000m peaks on the North side of the Sim Gang Glacier in the heart of the Karakoram Mountains.

The five expedition members departed for Rawalpindi in Pakistan on the 17th of July from Manchester Airport. From Rawalpindi a 22 hour bus Journey took us to Skardu on the 21st of July. A local company, Concordia Trekking, was contracted to provide a cook, assistance in hiring porters and in purchasing the food and cooking equipment we required. After a 10 hour jeep ride to Tonga, (near Askole), and a further 4 days of trekking we pitched our Base Camp at 4500m on the true left bank of the Biafo Glacier on the 28th of July.

Having selected an appropriate route to the summit of an interesting but unnamed peak of about 5800m we established an Advanced Base Camp below the peak at an altitude of 4900m. On the 2nd of August at 1:00am we started our climb, hoping to reach the summit that day. We made good progress and had established ourselves on a ridge leading to the summit by about 6:30am. The ridge was knife edged and composed of very unstable boulders, and progress along the ridge was very slow. When only 150m below the summit we decided not to continue any further that day.

After a nights rest at Advanced Base Camp we set out to return to Base Camp, and soon encountered our cook wandering alone on the glacier having been "chased" out of camp by a "big bear". The bear had eaten most of our food and we had no choice but to return to the valley. This effectively put an end to our expedition which was very disappointing, as we were all feeling fit and we felt confident we could successfully climb our objectives given a little more time.

We left Base Camp on the 5th of August and four days later were back in Skardu. Unable to change the date of our flights home we spent one week trekking on the Deosai plane, crossing the Burgi Pass which has stunning views of all the Karakoram giants. After returning to Skardu, Dick and Jeff made a rock climb up the huge face of the Rock of Skardu. We returned to Rawalpindi via Gilgit, and departed from Pakistan on the 4th of September.

# 2. Personnel

<b>Phil Birch</b>	Age 22	Durham University	Engineering Graduate
<b>Nigel Crook</b>	Age 20	Durham University	Geophysics 3rd Year
<b>Richard Dixon</b>	Age 21	Lancaster University	Geophysics 2nd Year
<b>Chris May</b>	Age 21	Durham University	Physics Graduate
<b>Jeff Snoxell</b>	Age 22	Durham University	Engineering Graduate

The five expedition members were close friends who had climbed extensively with each other in Britain and the Alps.

### **3. Planning and Fund Raising**

The expedition gratefully received grants from the Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council. Durham University also made a donation for the production of a report.

As the expedition members were at different stages in their university careers it quickly became apparent that not everyone could put an equal amount of effort into fund raising. It was therefore decided that each individual would keep the money they had raised and put it towards their personal contribution. Money was donated from Companies, Trusts, Colleges, and raised by sales of T shirts and Postcards and from the profits of a mountaineering lecture. Discounts on equipment were also gratefully received from several companies. Each member ultimately made a personal contribution of between £900 - £1200. See Accounts.

The idea for the expedition was conceived in October 1992, but the majority of the planning was not undertaken until the final months before departure. The organisation was shared between all five members, each taking responsibility for different tasks.

### **4. Transport**

The expedition booked flights through Karakoram Experience, flying from Manchester to Islamabad on P.I.A. It is slightly cheaper to get a bargain flight from London to Karachi, and then to get an internal flight to Islamabad. However, we had an extra 20Kg of baggage allowance each on the outward flight with Karakoram Experience, and it was considerably easier to fly direct to Islamabad from the North of England where all five of us lived.

The monsoon in Rawalpindi was creating problems with the flights to Skardu, so we hired a minibus to take us and all of our equipment overland. This is a very exciting journey along the Karakoram Highway, but a private minibus is more expensive than flying to Skardu. On the return to Rawalpindi we had considerably less baggage so we took the public bus, which was very cheap, but even more exciting!

From Skardu a jeep can be taken as far as possible towards Askole before starting the walk in. The road beyond Dassu is in a constant state of repair, and we came up against six road blocks, caused by landslide or where the river had eaten away at the road. Although the blocks do not look as though they have been caused deliberately, the Pakistanis have somehow managed to position a jeep on the section of road between each block! It is therefore possible to simply unload one jeep and carry the equipment around the landslide to the jeep waiting on the other side. The problem, however, is that the man who owns the jeep in that section of road can hold you to ransom and charge a small fortune for his services. It is difficult to bargain with these people and this was one expense we hadn't expected.

## **5. Medical**

We took a comprehensive medical kit which contained a good selection of dressings, antiseptics, pain killers of various strengths, and antibiotics. The expedition also carried its own hypodermic needles in case of medical emergencies. All the expedition members were familiar with basic first aid techniques, and the expedition carried an excellent and highly recommended book called 'Medicine for Mountaineering' by James A. Wilkerson, which deals with every conceivable illness or injury. We suffered no serious medical problems, and donated our unused medication to an organisation in Skardu which provides medicine for the poor.

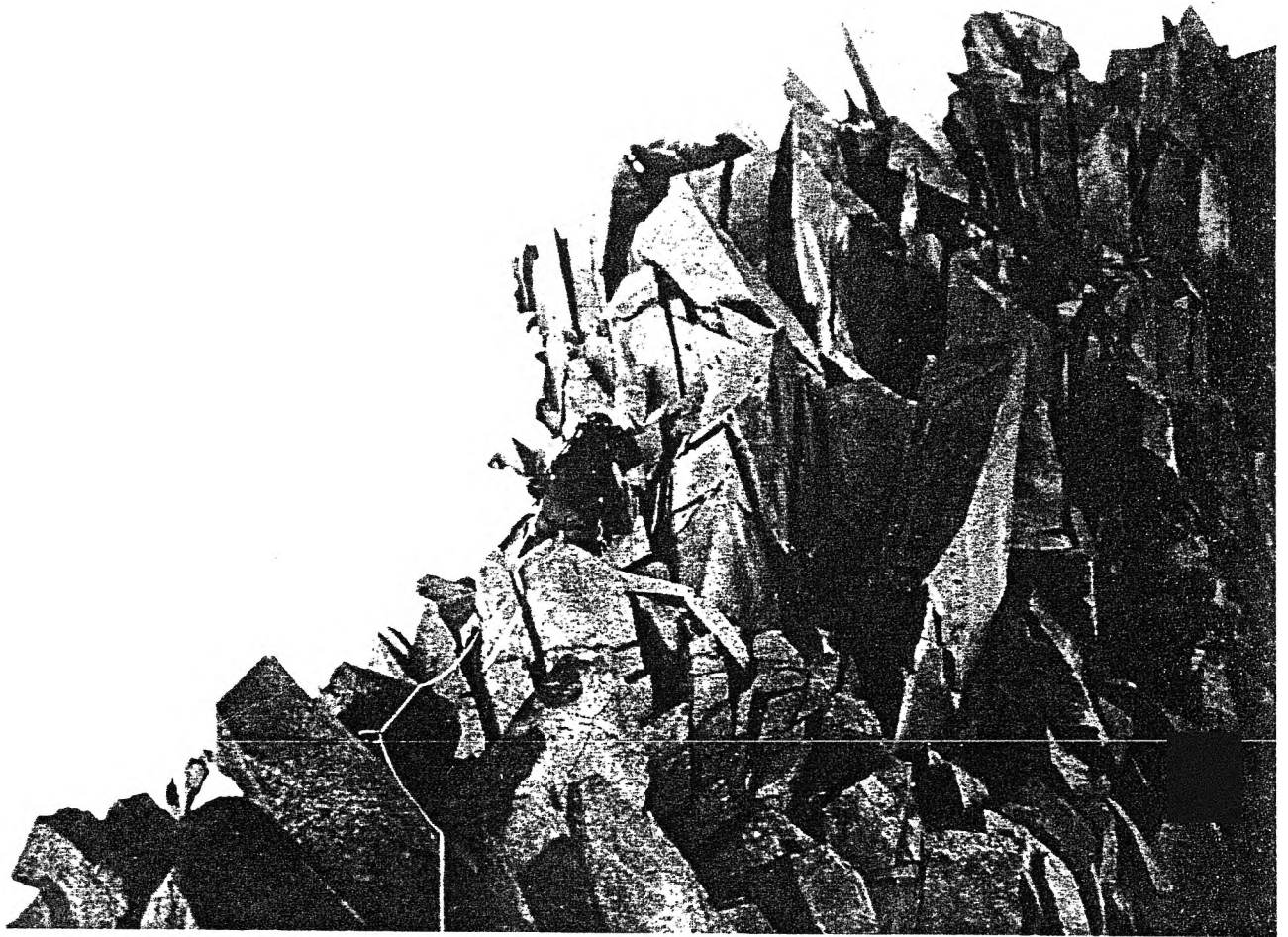
To help with acclimatisation all the expedition members took 500mg of Diamox daily, starting two days before ascending above 3000m and for one day after arrival at Base Camp. We cannot be sure whether this was any help, but all five of us felt we acclimatised well, and suffered only pins and needles as a side effect of the drug.

The expedition purchased a Pur Scout water filter, which we used constantly throughout the expedition. This appeared to work very well, and we did not suffer badly from any gastrointestinal disorders.

## **6. Weather and Specialist Equipment**

The summer of 1994 had been an exceptionally dry one in the Karakoram, and we experienced nothing but blue skies and very little wind. Consequently the snowline was just above Base Camp, and many of the crevasses were visible. The good weather had brought some problems however, and the Sim Gang Glacier was covered in melt water rivers and huge pools of slush and water. We found this impossible to cross without getting very wet, and had to look for an alternative route to avoid this.

We had been advised by several people who had visited this area that skis or snowshoes would prove very useful for covering the large distances from Base Camp to the mountains of the Sim Gang. Acting on this advice we took snowshoes, (cheaper), but did not use them because of the unusual conditions.



*Above: Dick making slow progress on the summit ridge.*



*Right: Jeff, Chris & Nige on the steep headwall.*

## 7. Porters and Other Staff

On arrival in Skardu the expedition contracted Concordia Trekking, a local company, to provide a cook, assistance in hiring porters and in purchasing the food and cooking equipment we required. This is more expensive than organising everything oneself, but it makes life considerably easier for those on their first expedition.

Our cook, Gullam Nabi, acted as a guide/sirdar on the walk in, and then stayed with us as a cook at base camp. He expected us to provide him with footwear, a sleeping bag, a rucksack, a jacket, sunglasses and socks. He also expected to keep these items and all of our kitchen equipment after the expedition. We provided everything but, much to his disgust, did not let him keep all of the things he wanted.

We employed 20 porters from Skardu, Satpara and Shigar. We had no real problems with them, except for a few removable rucksack straps going missing, and demands for gifts of money and ski sticks, which when refused, caused the porters to whinge and sulk. It is important to fix the payment per stage, and the number of stages before setting out. Our guide and porters tried to convince us there were 10 stages to Base Camp, when we believed there were only 6. We eventually compromised at 7, paying 100Rs per stage, 50Rs for a return stage, 50Rs per day for food, and 150Rs per porter for equipment.

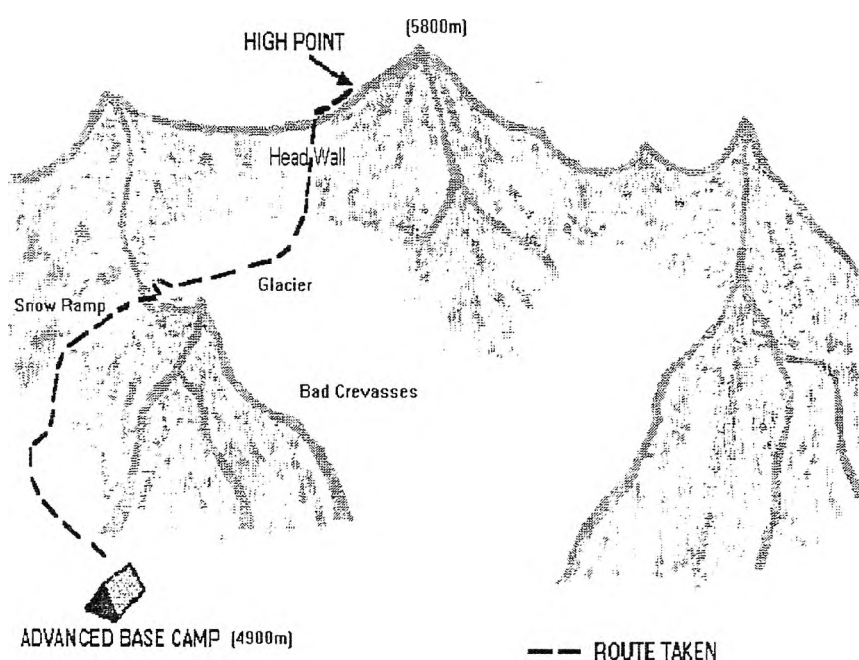
## 8. Climbing

Our tents at Base Camp were pitched on platforms of rock amidst the jumble of boulders at the edge of the glacier, and our water came from a series of melt water pools. The views from this camp were stunning; Across the glacier, which is almost 2 miles wide here, is the perfectly shaped Sosbun Brakk, to its left is the view down the Biafo Glacier, and to its right are the soaring granite walls and towers that have become known as the West Biafo Wall. We never grew tired of this view, and it was a wonderful place to stay.

Having taken a rest day after our arrival at Base Camp we set out for the Sim Gang Glacier in order to try and select a route up the first peak we wanted to attempt. Many crevasses were encountered where the Sim Gang meets the Biafo, and by 8:30am the whole of the central area of the Sim Gang was turning to slush. We were unable to cross the middle of the glacier or make as much progress up the glacier as we wanted due to huge pools of water, surface rivers too wide and deep to cross and the worsening slushy conditions. Although we didn't have quite the view we were hoping for, we believed we could see a suitable route to the summit of an interesting looking peak of approximately 5800m. As far as we knew the peak had no name and had never been climbed.

On the 1st of August we established an Advanced Base Camp at the foot of the peak at an altitude of about 4900m, having taken a far superior route across the

glacier, avoiding the worst of the crevasses and all of the melt water by taking a line near the true right bank of the Biafo and Sim Gang glaciers. At 1:00am the following morning we set out on our climb, hoping to reach the summit that day. Using head torches we ascended an easy glacier to the foot of a steep snow ramp which lead up the West side of a ridge to a notch. The snow conditions were excellent and our ice axe placements were reassuringly secure so that despite the darkness and the steep gradient we were able to move together, reaching the notch in the ridge just as the sun was beginning to rise, revealing K2 for the first time. From this point we traversed a short distance along the East side of the ridge, before descending about 50m to the upper part of a hanging glacier on this East side. This route had enabled us to safely reach the upper part of this glacier which was hopelessly crevassed lower down. By 5:45am we had reached the bergschrund at the head of the glacier which separated us from the steep headwall of snow which lead up to the summit ridge.



Nigel and Dick reached the summit ridge at about 6:15am; Phil, Chris and Jeff moving as a rope of three got there half an hour later. The summit ridge was extremely narrow, and composed of huge granite boulders piled unstably on top of each other. On the South side we looked down on the Sim Gang Glacier and the route we had just ascended, but on the North side the face was so steep it was not visible from above, falling sheer down to Shipton's Snow Lake some 700m below. In 45 minutes Dick and Nigel had made very little progress along the ridge, the ground was not technically very hard, just unstable and extremely precarious. Although less than 150m vertically below the summit we made the decision not to pursue this route any further that day.

We descended back to the upper part of the hanging glacier, reaching it by 11:00am, the headwall proving considerably harder in decent. We waited here for some 7 hours, by which time the sun had almost gone down, and the glacier had been in shade long enough to be sufficiently firm to descend back to the notch in the ridge. From here we were able to make a series of abseils, in the dark, down the snow ramp we had climbed 20 hours earlier, arriving back at the



tents by 11:00pm. Although we had not reached the top it had been a wonderful days climbing on a varied and interesting route among spectacular scenery.

## 9. The Bear

At 5:00am on the morning following our climb, we set out to return to Base Camp, roped together as usual due to the crevasses, but after a short distance we were stopped in our tracks as Nigel pointed out a solitary figure walking across the other side of the glacier. The figure was in the area of the melt water rivers and pools, and was walking towards the heavily crevassed region where the two glaciers meet. It was difficult to believe that anyone would be walking alone intentionally through this difficult place, and whoever it was stood a good chance of disappearing into a crevasse never to be seen again. We altered our course towards the individual, and when we were close enough we shouted and waved our arms to attract their attention. The figure let out the most terrible wailing sound confirming our suspicions that not all was well with this person.

The figure started moving towards us, letting out occasional screams and wails. We thought that it might be someone who had experienced some terrible accident and that they were going to be in a very bad way, possibly asking us to help find the body of their companion. I think we were all secretly quite worried by the impending confrontation, but as we got nearer it became apparent that it was our cook Gullam Nabi. As he reached us he broke down in tears, telling us how he had been chased out of the camp by a "big bear" and had spent a terrible night out on the glacier with only cotton trousers, a cotton shirt and a cheap anorak for warmth. We gave him some water, equipped him with sun glasses and tied him into the rope for the walk back to Base Camp.

The bear had demolished the tent in which we kept our food, and had eaten or destroyed all the food it could get at, leaving us with only tinned food. Very disappointed, we had little option but to start making plans to return to the valley. We did not have enough food to make another attempt on the mountain, and even if we had, Gullam Nabi would not have been prepared to stay in the camp alone again. Fortunately a large party of trekkers arrived in our camp that afternoon, and they were able to spare a sack of food, and enough porters for us to get all of our equipment back to the valley. We would not have sufficient time or money to enable us to come back and we simply had to accept the disappointment of this enforced evacuation.

We had been warned of the danger of bears on the Biafo Glacier, but had not known what precautions to take. If there are several people in the camp it is possible to throw stones at the bear until it goes away, another good trick is to leave a lantern burning outside all night. Perhaps the best way of avoiding bear attacks, (other than using a gun!), is to take bangers to scare the bear off. Our cook had wanted a companion because of the bears, but we had convinced him it would do no good. It may be difficult to find cooks willing to stay alone on the Biafo Glacier.

## 10. Accounts

### Funding

	£
Sponsors	1,500
Personal contributions (and money raised individually)	6,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,000</b>

### UK Expenditure

	£
Flights	2,695
Food	150
Visas	125
Insurance	1,020
Gas	194
Group equipment and medical supplies	300

### Pakistan Expenditure

	£
Hotels	350
Food	450
Porters	1,300
Cook/Guide	330
Trekking company fees	130
Transport	500
Equipment hire and kitchen equipment	200
Miscellaneous	200
<b>Total cost of Expedition</b>	<b>7,984</b>

## 11. Useful Addresses

<b>Expedition Members:</b>	Phil Birch 39 King Egbert Road Sheffield S17 3QR	Nigel Crook 1 St James Road Blackpool FY4 2HZ
Richard Dixon 5 Westfield Hipperholme HX3 8AS	Chris May 21 Liddgate Shot Ratho Midlothian EH28 8TY	Jeff Snoxell 4 Gillamoor Road Hewarth York YO3 0QE

### **British Mountaineering Council**

Crawford House  
Precinct Centre  
Booth Street East  
Manchester  
M13 9RZ

### **Concordia Trekking Services**

PO Box 626  
Skardu  
Pakistan

### **Himalayan Treks and Tours**

112 Rahims Plaza  
Murree Road  
Rawalpindi  
Pakistan

### **Karakoram Experience**

Trekkers Lodge  
32 Lake Road  
Keswick  
CA12 5DQ

### **MLM Systems** (for Freight of Gas)

Ty Gwyn  
Nant Peris  
Gwynedd  
LL55 4UE

### **High Commission For Pakistan** (for Visa Applications)

35 Lowndes Square  
London  
SW1X 9JN