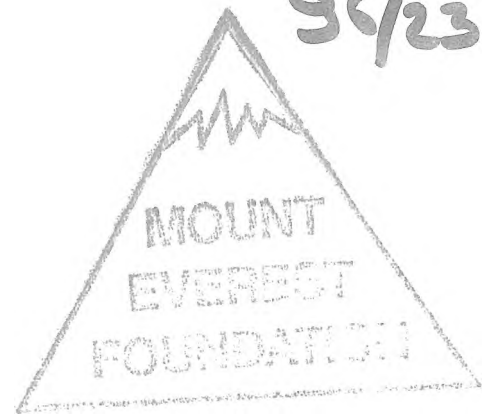


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# BRITISH NUSHIK EXPEDITION 1996

## Expedition Report

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## Introduction

During the Haramosh II Expedition in 1995, we could not help noticing a prominent unknown mountain. From the Haramosh glacier, it dominated the view to the north east, looming up behind the ridge bounding the far end of the Sgari byen gang glacier. Exact location was problematical, and the map (Jersy Wala) showed no peaks with names or heights in the area. It was dubbed "Paramount peak" for its superficial resemblance to the mountain on the film logo.

Back home, the temptation to try and find it, then climb it proved irresistible; so was born the "British Nushik Expedition 1995". The rather flippant "Paramount" name was dropped in favour of an established local name. The Nushik La is the old pass linking the Kero Lungma and Hispar glaciers, and our mystery mountain appeared to be somewhere nearby. Subsequently, more careful study of maps and photos showed the Nushik name to be a misnomer, the peak appeared much closer to another pass, the Bolocho La. This location was confirmed on the ground during the 1996 trip. So our third attempt at naming the mountain is "Bolocho Peak".

The suspected location close to the Bolocho La, meant that we had a choice of three approach glaciers: Kero Lungma, Bolocho, and East Makrong. We chose the first of these three for selfish reasons, but practical ones: none of us had been up the Kero Lungma, and it seemed to offer plenty of alternative objectives should our primary one prove too dangerous or inaccessible. In the event, our mountain was not, in fact, readily accessible from the Kero Lungma, but we had a whole glacier-full of mountains to go at, and we had no record of any of them having been touched.

Brian Davison, Dave Wilkinson and Colin Wells had all seen the mountain from the Haramosh trip, and fancied a go; but Brian had to drop out because of injury. Bill Church and Tony Park later joined the team, successfully seduced by our photos.

Our mountain appeared to be under the magic 6000 metres limit, so Pakistani government permit, peak fee and liaison officer were not required. This left a minimal amount of organising to be done, and Dave applied for grants from the Mount Everest Foundation, the British Mountaineering Council and the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. Colin organised a generous and useful donation of hill food from Booths Supermarket, a company with branches in Lancashire and Cumbria.

## The Outward Journey

We flew direct from Manchester to Islamabad with PIA, who gave us an extra baggage allowance of 20 kg. each for the outward journey. Dave flew on 14th July to buy supplies and arrange onward transport. The others followed 4 days later, and the party left Rawalpindi for Skardu by minibus on the 20th, arriving in the small hours of the 21st. In Skardu, we were kindly helped by Mohammed Changesi, a local man with vast experience of trekking and expedition organisation. He was very generous with advice and help in arranging hire of jeeps and porters.

This year, there had been heavy snow in the spring, which had caused problems with the condition of jeep roads. Our road had suffered a landslide at the village of Niesolo, a short walk before Doko, where we had driven to in '95. This cost us half a stage in porters' wages, but no extra time, as the walk only took an hour and a bit, and we did it the same day we drove from Skardu.

This short half stage was made up for the next day with quite a long stage from Doko to Arandu, the last village on this approach, and the parting of the ways from our previous year's walk-in.

Karakoram porters are keen to maximise their income, and generally miss few tricks in extracting the highest wages they can get away with. The Arandu men are no exception to this, though they are otherwise charming and reasonable. A good policy is to come to an unambiguous signed and sealed agreement on all details of length and number of porter stages, and pay and allowances per stage, before leaving civilisation. But the fact that few parties visit the Kero Lungma made it hard to define our stages in advance - there were no precedents that we could appeal to, and our base camp site did not seem to have a name, and the porters have, or feign, limited comprehension of maps. We had anticipated this, and in Skardu, Mr Changesi advised us of his rule-of-thumb for defining a porter stage as 3 hours *actual* walking (excluding rests) at normal walking speed. This sounds like a rather short stage, but since most porters normally walk fast with plenty of rests, it is actually quite a fair definition. We carefully timed the porters for the whole walk-in from Arandu to base camp. But of course this did not impress the porters as they did not recognise Changesi's rule. Their view is that the stages are determined by past custom and practice, which they know but we don't, so they feel free to dictate whatever suits them, i.e. lots of short stages.

A day and a half from Arandu, we reached the point the Porters had thought was our intended base camp, but this was well short of our hoped for site. Some strong negotiation took place, and at one point, several of the porters headed back towards Arandu *with their loads*; we were indebted to Skandar, the Arandu village head-man who had accompanied us, for dissuading them from abandoning us totally. One older porter claimed to have been with two trekking parties in previous years, to Nushik La and Bolocho La. He claimed that, using payment received on these trips as a precedent, it was four and a half stages from Arandu to our base camp. Our estimate was three stages, or at most three and a half. After protracted and heated debate, we eventually settled for four stages, and continued on our way.

The Kero Lungma is a beautiful and remote glacier. The glacier itself is the usual Karakoram horror-show, covered with tedious moraine rubble. But both sides are bordered by extensive ablation valleys, providing delightful walking through grass and flowers. We were following the south bank. The night following the labour troubles, we stopped at a spot the porters knew as "Katcha Bransa", where we found wild onions growing. Bill picked them to supplement our food for the evening meal. It was time to forgive our harsh words of earlier that day. The older porter who had been so insistent in the arguments came to me and told me that he wished to shave off his beard, and did I have a razor he could borrow? I said I did, and offered to shave him myself. This lengthy operation caused great amusement among his fellows, who watched intently. There was much general banter all round, and the earlier tensions seemed to have dispersed.

## Base camp

A short walk next morning passed a side glacier, and up to another smaller ablation valley, where we made our base camp. The total actual walking time for the porters from Arandu came to 8 hours 40 minutes, three stages by Changesi's rule. We paid them the four stages we had been compelled to agree to. We had been ripped off, but not grossly.

None of the porters had a name for this place. Place names are useful for general reference, and more specially as an aid in identifying destinations and so enabling prior agreements to be reached with porters. After discussions with Skandar, we agreed to call our base camp site "Tsuntse Bransa" ("Small Pasture" in Balti).

In Skardu, we had been approached by Ali, who wanted to work as our cook. We were ambivalent about having a cook. A bad cook is worse than none, but a good cook not only does the domestic chores at base camp and produces good meals, but also doubles up as base camp guard, protecting the camp, not so much from human thieves (this is not normally much of a problem in Pakistan), as from animals (especially ravens). But Ali also wished us to retain his young friend Yakob as cook's assistant. (Yakob would work as a porter in any case). We had agreed to hire Ali as cook up to base camp, where we would review the situation, and retain him for the rest of the trip if we were satisfied with his work. But we said quite clearly that we would not employ more than one cook. Now Ali decided that he did not want to stay at base camp (on his own while we were away climbing). We paid him for his services so far and he went off with the porters. This left us with extra supplies - we *had* catered for his presence, in case he had stayed. At least we were now guaranteed not to run out of food.

With no cook, base camp security had to be considered, especially the risk of food being plundered by ravens. These large and greedy birds are a growing menace in the region, and familiarity with humans seems to make them even cheekier than in the past. We had thought that, as this glacier was relatively unfrequented, the local ravens would be more timid than in more popular sites, or less aware of the possibilities for a cheap meal. But within a few days of our arrival, one appeared, hovering menacingly about the camp. We *had* planned for this. The majority of our loads had been packed in barrels - the familiar blue plastic ones made for various industrial purposes, and widely used by expeditions. Not only are these a convenient vessel for packing and portering, they are also invaluable for protecting food from ravens and other scavengers, not to mention sundry other uses like water storage and base camp beer brewing.

The camp was situated in a small ablation valley, easily reached from the glacier below, but well banked up with old snow, except for the edges, where flowers were starting to bloom. The snow-free hillside above was already in full bloom, and patches of wild rhubarb were nearing maturity, a tasty desert to our evening meals. We camped close to a large boulder which we used as one wall of our cooking shelter. Melt from the snow banks provided ample water supplies for all the time we were there, but in a less snowy year, the supply could be a problem, though there was a more permanent looking stream a short walk away.



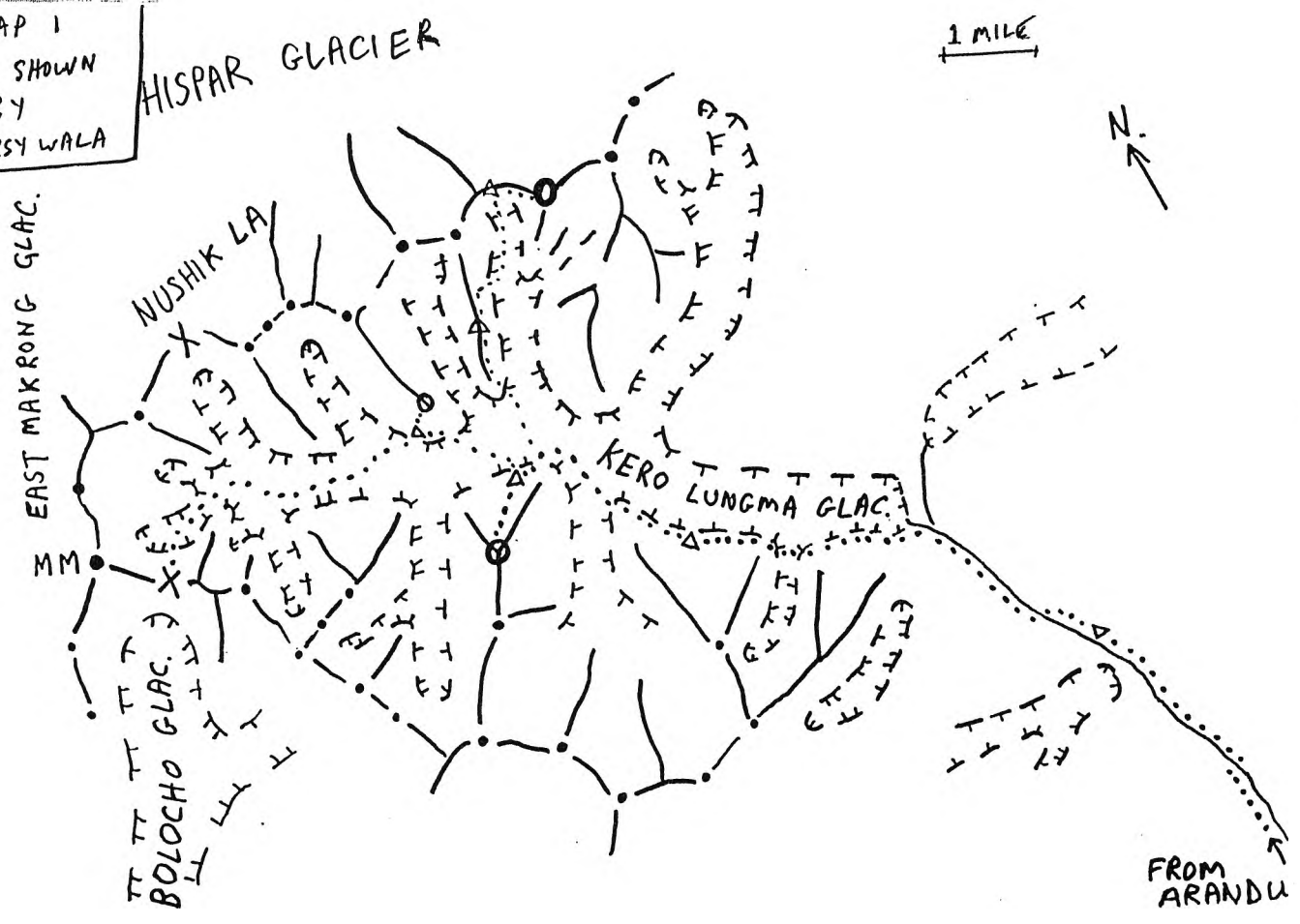
## Acclimatisation and Reconnaissance

Above our base camp rose a mountain of about 5000m altitude (later named "Tsuntse Brakk": "Small Peak", an unimaginative but descriptive name). The weather was fine (an extension of the normal good walk-in weather, before the usual bad weather sets in for the climbing). We decided to try this peak as acclimatisation and for a view. Bill did a one-man reconnaissance the day after our arrival. Next day, Bill, Dave and Colin, went up again with the intention of climbing it (Parky was still ill from a walk-in stomach bug), but we left too late and took an inferior line, so retreated. The next day, Parky felt well enough, but Colin now felt ill, so Bill, Dave and Parky completed the ascent. This time, a different variation on a rib of rotten rock was taken low down, which was worse than the previous line, but higher up the correct line was taken, and the snowy upper half of the route went without incident, except for a short section 150 metres from the top. This gave a pitch of Scottish grade 3, and proved quite awkward with only one axe and a ski-stick each. The view from the top was tremendous, but identification of our mystery mountain still proved uncertain.

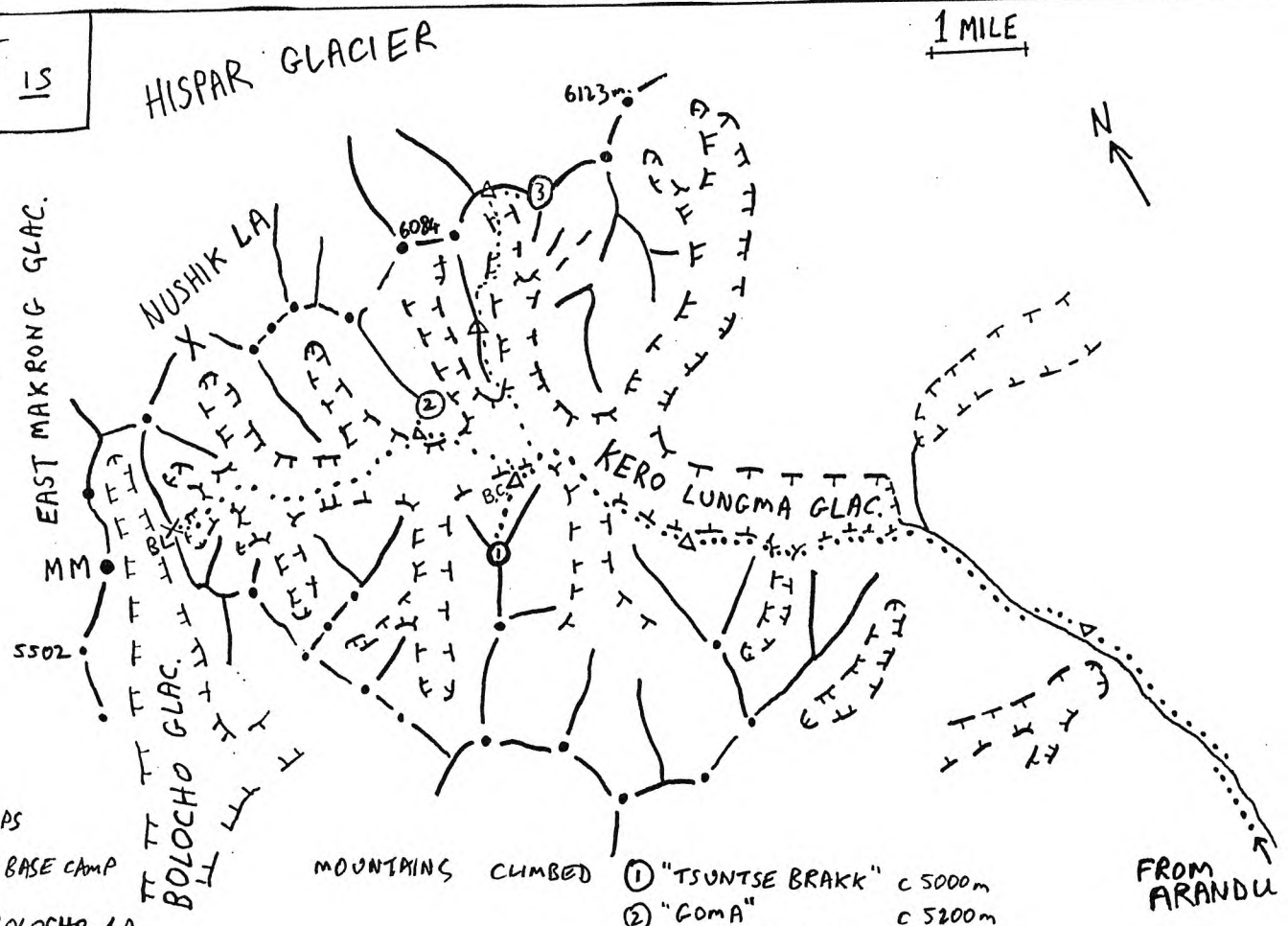
After a couple of days rest, we decided to walk up the glacier to try and find our mountain. Across the glacier and up the lateral moraine led us past an icefall section of the glacier to a camp site where the moraine petered out. We returned to base camp the same day, and came back up with more supplies the next day to stay. The weather was now unsettled, and our mountain was still being elusive, but a partial clearing in the evening stripped away its cover and revealed it rising above the Bolocho La at the head of the Kero Lungma. The previous year's view from the Haramosh glacier had shown a single steep and impressive peak, but from this angle, the mountain was seen as a ridge of peaks with the highest point at the far end. This looked fairly inaccessible directly, but the near end of the ridge looked possible, followed by a long ridge traverse to the main summit. The most worrying fact (or the most comforting, depending on one's attitude) was that, contrary to the map, the mountain appeared to be the other side of the Bolocho La, and so would not be directly accessible from the Kero Lungma. We seemed to have come up the wrong valley!

Rain fell again in the night, but stopped by dawn. For further acclimatisation and reconnaissance, we decided to bag another small peak above this camp. This was an easy walk up snow slopes with a very short top section on easy rotten rock. We estimated the height as 5200m. We called this peak "Goma", after the plump grouse-like birds (ram chikor) which we found nesting in abundance on its lower slopes. Next day, with an earlier start, we took an exhausting walk up the snowy glacier to the Bolocho La. Our previous impression was confirmed: the map was incorrect (we stand by this), and our glacier *was* the wrong one. The Bolocho glacier was in fact longer than shown, and to get to the mountain from this side, we would have had to cross the pass and descend to the Bolocho glacier, before starting our climb. Having only limited time and resources, we rejected this option, and decided to look for an alternative objective.

MAP 1  
AS SHOWN  
BY  
JESY WALA



MAP 2  
AS IT IS



Δ CAMPS  
 Δ BC. BASE CAMP  
 BLX BOLOCHO LA

MOUNTAINS CLIMBED

- ① "TSUNTSE BRAKK" c 5000m
- ② "GOMA" c 5200m
- ③ "REDAKH BRAKK" c 6000m

MM ● MOUNTAIN WE HAD AS OUR ORIGINAL OBJECTIVE ("MYSTERY MOUNTAIN")

## Ibex Peak

Across the glacier from our base camp, three small glaciers descended from the “Balchish range”, the group of peaks forming the divide between the Kero Lungma and Hispar glaciers. We had had plenty of time to look this way from our base camp. We chose a pyramid-shaped peak on this ridge, marked as a peak on the map, but with no name or height given. We estimated its height as about 6000m., just legal. The best approach seemed to ascend the lower ridge of the next peak to the west, then via the intervening glacier to a col overlooking the Hispar, and finally up the west ridge of our peak. After a few days of unsettled weather, a better spell seemed to be starting, so we packed four days worth of food and set off at mid-day to cross the glacier to a flat bottomed ablation valley shaped like an amphitheatre. Steep slopes of grass and flowers then led to a camp site just below the snow line. Hoof marks and droppings showed the area to be well frequented by ibex, and at the camp site, a large male watched our arrival from a nearby rock, with the air of an indignant landowner and lord of the harem.

Next morning, a four am start saw us gain the glacier on our right, where we were surprised to see tracks of our ibex herd on the snow, weaving between the crevasses with plenty of good glacier sense, but no apparent destination in terms of pasture - we were now well above the snow line. Perhaps these creatures roam around the glaciers just for bravado and the general joi de vivre of it. We subsequently named our mountain “Redakh Brakk”, Balti for “Ibex Peak”, after these free-roaming beasts.

By 9 am, we had reached our col, where we had superb vistas of the seven-thousand metre peaks across the Hispar, the Haramosh group in the opposite direction, and an impressive view of the final ridge of our chosen peak, looking much steeper than had been apparent from base camp. We also had a luxury camp site on a flat shaly area of the col, with full en-suite running water from a melting snow patch.

We had only 500 metres of height to gain, and this was a west ridge, so would not get the first sun. An early start seemed unnecessary, so we set off just before dawn, traversing round some bumps on the level ridge to gain the proper foot of our ridge at a narrower subsidiary col. To our left, huge cornices projected out over the Hispar; we climbed by a series of couloirs, traverses and short steps well right of the crest. Conditions were superb. We were travelling light, with ropes in our sacs, but they seemed superfluous, so we enjoyed the freedom and exhilaration of unroped climbing, revelling in the exposure and the feel of crampon points in perfect neve. Dave, who prefers a leisurely pace on approach walks, befitting his age, decided that his expedition leader's role needed justifying, so went ahead. The middle part of the ridge steepened to a 50 metre section at 60 degrees plus, giving sustained calf-sapping work. The only noises from below were from Parky, who hung back to avoid the chips of icy debris from above. On such ground, the first man totally avoids falling bodies of all sorts. Dave's going first should perhaps be ascribed more to selfish motives born of long experience, rather than anything more altruistic in terms of leadership. The ridge eased, and led in a series of broad corniced curves to a final cornice barrier. This was demolished with five minutes of old-fashioned chopping with the axe. A quick pull through the gap landed immediately on the summit and total exhilaration.



After ten minutes of panorama gazing and photography, thoughts of sun-softened snow called us downwards. A single long abseil down the steep bit, and varying individual styles of down-climbing, facing in, out, sideways and all ways round, and we were back in camp by 10 am for a second breakfast.

Starting very early next morning, Dave and Bill made a half-hearted attempt on the peak the other way from the col ("Brick-a-Brakk"). Easy snow led to a final ridge of tottering piano-sized blocks of rock. The flesh pots beckoned, so we retreated, and all four went back the same day to base camp, and what little remained of our barrel of home-brew.

## Return

There might, perhaps, have been time for one more route, but weather worsened again, our time was almost up, and enthusiasm with it. Bill and Colin went for an old-fashioned col-crossing by returning via the Nushik La to Hispar and Gilgit. This did at least justify the expedition's name. Their subsequent account of the descent of the steeper Hispar side, with 45 degree icy slopes traversing under seracs, made the old tales of crossing this pass with cattle hard to believe. Meanwhile, Parky went down to Arandu to send the porters up while Dave stayed on his own to tidy up and pack.

Base camp and peak names were chosen after discussion with Skandar and later with Changesi in Skardu.

## Expedition Diary

- July 14th Dave flies from Manchester.
- 18th Bill, Colin and Parky fly from Manchester.
- 21st Leave 'Pindi early a.m. by road.
- 22nd Arrive Skardu early a.m.
- 24th Leave Skardu early a.m. by jeep. Arrive Niesolo early p.m. Walk to Doko.
- 25th Arandu.
- 27th Arrive base camp midday.
- 30th Bill, Parky & Dave climb Tsuntse Brakk.
- Aug. 5th All four climb Goma.
- 6th To Bolocho La.
- 13th Summit of Redakh Brakk.
- 21st Bill & Colin cross Nushik La. Parky arrives Arandu.
- 22nd Dave & porters leave Base camp.
- 28th Parky & Dave arrive 'Pindi.
- 30th Bill & Colin arrive 'Pindi.
- Sept. 1st Fly back to GB.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to record our thanks to the following people and organisations, who helped us in various ways:

Mount Everest Foundation, British Mountaineering Council (Sports Council funds) and the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, for generous grants of money.

Booths Supermarket, and St Giles Foods (makers of “lite egg” dried egg) for food donations.

Phoenix for the loan of tents.

Mike Wood for donation of medical supplies.

K.E. Adventure Travel of Keswick (formerly Karakoram Experience) and PIA for our flights.

Mohammed Changesi for help and advice in Skardu.

Lastly, but most importantly, the porters of Baltistan for carrying our luggage into the mountains.

## Accounts

Income	£	Expenditure	£
Grant from M.E.F.	1100.00	Travel and transport	
Grant from B.M.C.	1000.00	4 return air fares @ £539	2156.00
Grant from F.S.A.	550.00	Buses 'Pindi - Skardu & return.	219.57
Members' contributions (4@ £ 625.24)	2500.96	Local buses & taxis	21.40
Total income	<u>£5150.96</u>	Jeeps	<u>127.84</u>
			2524.81
		Porters etc.	
		Porters' wages & allowances	584.76
		Porters' Insurance	<u>21.73</u>
			606.49
		Food	
		Food bought in U.K.	30.50
		Exped. food bought in Pakistan	367.79
		Food in hotels, cafes, etc.	<u>244.09</u>
			642.38
		Other supplies	
		Paraffin, pots & pans, packing, etc.	174.42
		Epigas	<u>49.00</u>
			203.42
		Accommodation (Hotels, etc.)	261.39
		Visas (4 @ £40)	160.00
		Members' Insurance (4 @ £139.60)	558.40
		Costs of money handling (re-exchange, etc.)	111.67
		Sundry costs in Pakistan	23.67
		Sundry costs in U.K.	38.73
		Total expenditure	<u>£5150.96</u>

## Notes on Expenditure

- 1) Porters' wages shown here (£584.76) include walk-in costs of the cook who did not stay.
- 2) Equipment costs do not appear here (except for the £154.42 which includes base camp equipment for cooking etc.). Most of the mountain equipment was loaned by the members. Members bought various items of personal gear for the trip, but these are not shown in the accounts, as they varied so much between different members.
- 3) This was a little-known glacier, so costs of porters etc. were hard to predict. We took plenty of spare money, which accounts for the high figure of £111.67 for money-handling costs (mainly the loss on changing these funds from £ to rupees and back again.)