

British Choktoi Expedition 1997



The porter team at base camp on the Choktoi Glacier ~4400m.

Was generously supported by

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Summary

In June 1997, five of us flew out to Islamabad, to climb in the Choktoi Glacier region of the Pakistani Karakorum for 7 weeks, home of the Latoks and the Ogre. We had several aims:

1. To make the first ascent of Hanipispur South (6047m).
2. To put up new routes and first ascents on other 'sub'-6000ers.
3. To recce the new route potential on Latok III and North Face of the Ogre.

The weather was mostly superb and predictable, though on several occasions Murphy's law prevailed and we were caught out and forced into retreat. However, we did achieve the following:

1. Reached 6000m on Hanipispur South, being forced back 2 or 3 rope lengths from the summit by bad snow conditions (AD).
2. Made the first ascent of an independent peak (~5400m) East of Latok IV near the mouth of the Choktoi, by its NorthWest ridge (AD).
3. Reached ~5800m on the unclimbed Choktoi peak (6166m), retreating at an impasse on the South face after some hard climbing (Scottish V/VI and A2).
4. Reached one third height on a variation of the 'Doug Scott' Spur on a 5000+m sub peak of Latok III, bailing off as we had no bivi kit/food/gas and had grossly underestimated the time it would take, as did its namesake on the first ascent (A1/2 and VS).
5. Reached half height on a different, higher sub peak of Latok III, being weathered off after some sustained climbing upto E2.
6. Recced the North side of Latok III and the Ogre and took a number of slides.

Basecamp was at 4400m on the moraine at the foot of Hanipispur South and was made very welcoming by the ever-cheerful Ghulam, our cook/guide 'supplied' by Himalaya Treks and Tours.

The walk in took 4 days (3 days on the way out) and was a superb warm up (down) allowing good acclimatisation whilst walking through some amazing scenery.

There is some rubbish left by other European expeditions in the past on the Choktoi. We managed to more or less clear one old basecamp site but there are still one or two others waiting for an environmentally aware expedition to come along.....

The Team

There was originally to be 6 of us in the team, however Richard Vequeray obviously decided he couldn't hack it, threw himself down the stairs and broke his arm the day before we left. Boredom set in and within minutes he was engaged! The remaining 5 survived the 24 hours 'til kick off.

Guy Willett, 25. Dundee medical student (still) and Bristol graduate. He climbs E2 and grade VI and has climbed several seasons in the Alps. He has been on expeditions to Alaska, the Tien Shan, Svalbard and outback Australia.

Fiona Hatchell, 26. Veterinary surgeon in Barnard Castle. She climbs VS and grade III and has been on expeditions to Greenland, Svalbard (3 times), the Tien Shan, Malawi and Uganda.

Alex Franklin, 23. Freelance outdoor pursuits instructor. He climbs E3 and grade V and has big wall experience from a summer in Yosemite, climbing the Nose on El Capitan among others. He has climbed several seasons in the Alps including routes such as the North Faces of the Triolet and Courtes and West Face of the Blaitiere.

Will Garrett, 21. Edinburgh engineering student. He climbs E3 and up to grade VII/VIII, making the first ascent of the Migrant Direct last winter. He has been on expedition to Arctic Norway and climbed several routes in the Alps.

Colin Spark, 26. Environmental scientist in Hong Kong. He climbs E5, F8a and grade V and has climbed several seasons in the Alps, routes including the Cordier and Gervasutti Pillars. He has been on expedition to Peru.

Sponsors

We would very much like to thank **CONSOLTEX (USA) Inc.** for their most generous financial support and donation of breathable and weatherproof jackets and salopettes, which were more than tough enough for our requirements and to be highly recommended. **CONSOLTEX (USA) Inc.** is "a North American diversified fabric manufacturer of all types of winterwear, activewear and sportswear". This expedition would not have been possible without their support.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank for their support the following:

British Mountaineering Council, and in particular Andy MacNae

Sports Council

Mount Everest Foundation

Cotswolds – The Outdoor People

Foundation for Sport and the Arts

Millet

Black Diamond/Allcord

Diary

June 1997

- Sunday 15th Arrived Islamabad
- Monday 16th Shopping for food in Islamabad.
- Tuesday 17th Briefing at Ministry. Left for Skardu in the afternoon by bus.
- Wednesday 18th Arrived Skardu early afternoon. Shopping & packing loads.
- Thursday 19th Travelled from Skardu to Askole by jeep.
- Friday 20th Walked from Askole to Laskam (dirty water camp) with 30kg rucsacs & 26 porters.
- Saturday 21st Walked on to camp further up the Durnordo River valley.
- Sunday 22nd Walked on to camp on the junction between the Choktoi & Panmah glaciers.
- Monday 23rd Arrived at basecamp on the Choktoi glacier.
- Tuesday 24th Sorted out kit & food at basecamp.
- Wednesday 25th C, G & W - Explored Choktoi.
A & F - Walked up to camp at point 4554m on Choktoi.
- Thursday 26th C, G & W - Walked up to camp at point 4554m on Choktoi.
A & F - Walked up to coll east of Biacherahi Tower.
- Friday 27th C, G & W - Aborted attempt to climb point SE of Biacherahi tower due to crevasses.

A & F - Walked up to Sim La pass & back around the east face of the Ogre. We estimated the pass to be at ~5500m.
- Saturday 28th Aborted attempt to collect rubbish due to snow/sleet.
- Sunday 29th F & C - Up to camp on glacier (~5000m) SE of Hanispur S.
- Monday 30th Snow - about a foot fell up at glacier camp.

July 1997

- Tuesday 1st F & C - Recce of Hanispur South & then back down to BC.
G & A - Up to glacier camp. ((W - ill.)
- Wednesday 2nd C, F & W - Back up to glacier camp. (A - ill.)
- Thursday 3rd C, F, G & W - Recce of Hanispur South. (A - ill).
G, C & F - Attempted to climb Hanispur South overnight.
- Friday 4th Rest. A - back down to BC to recover.
- Saturday 5th G, W, C & F - Attempted to climb Hanispur South overnight & reached within 50 m of top.

Sunday 6th	All back down to BC.
Monday 7th	G, F & A - Walked down Choktoi to recce lower mountains.
Tuesday 8th	W, G & F - Climbed on Doug Scott spire.
Wednesday 9th	C started walking out. Sheffield expedition visited BC.
Thursday 10th	Rain. Played Canasta all day.
Friday 11th	F & G - Walked up to bivvy site at top of grass slope on 5400m peak.
Saturday 12th	F & G - Climbed 5400m peak & spent all day abseiling off it. W & A - Up scree to glacier camp SE of point 6166m.
Sunday 13th	W & A - Climbed on 6166m peak.
Monday 14th	W & A - Climbed on 6166m peak. F & G - Walked up Choktoi towards Sim La pass.
Tuesday 15th	W & A - Climbed on 6166m peak. F & G - Up to camp at base of Sim La. Conditions underfoot were very difficult.
Wednesday 16th	W & A - back to BC. F & G - Over the Sim La in the early hours. Spent the day in the Sim Gang & crossed back over the Sim La late in the evening.
Thursday 17th	F & G - back to BC for breakfast.
Friday 18th	F & A - Left BC early evening to go up to the Biacherahi coll. Heavily crevassed up to coll. Camped in Nobande-Sobande.
Saturday 19th	F & A - Crossed Skam La to camp in the Sim Gang.
Sunday 20th	F & A - Walked on down the Sim Gang. Snow. G & W - Recce of ice fall at base of rock route.
Monday 21st	G & W - Snow conditions prevented reaching the intended route. Did a smaller rock route. F & A - Snowbound.
Tuesday 22nd	G & W - Retrieved trapped rope off route. F & A - Snowbound.
Wednesday 23rd	F & A - Walked up Sim Gang to within 100m of Sim La. Conditions underfoot were very difficult.
Thursday 24th	F & A - Over Sim La in early hours & back to base camp. Cleared up BC. Tea party at Sheffield Base Camp.
Friday 25th	G & F - Cleared rubbish & tins from old expedition site up near point 4554m. Met American Ogre/Latok expedition. Sheffield expedition came over to BC for Pizza party.
Saturday 26th	Walked out to Panmah.

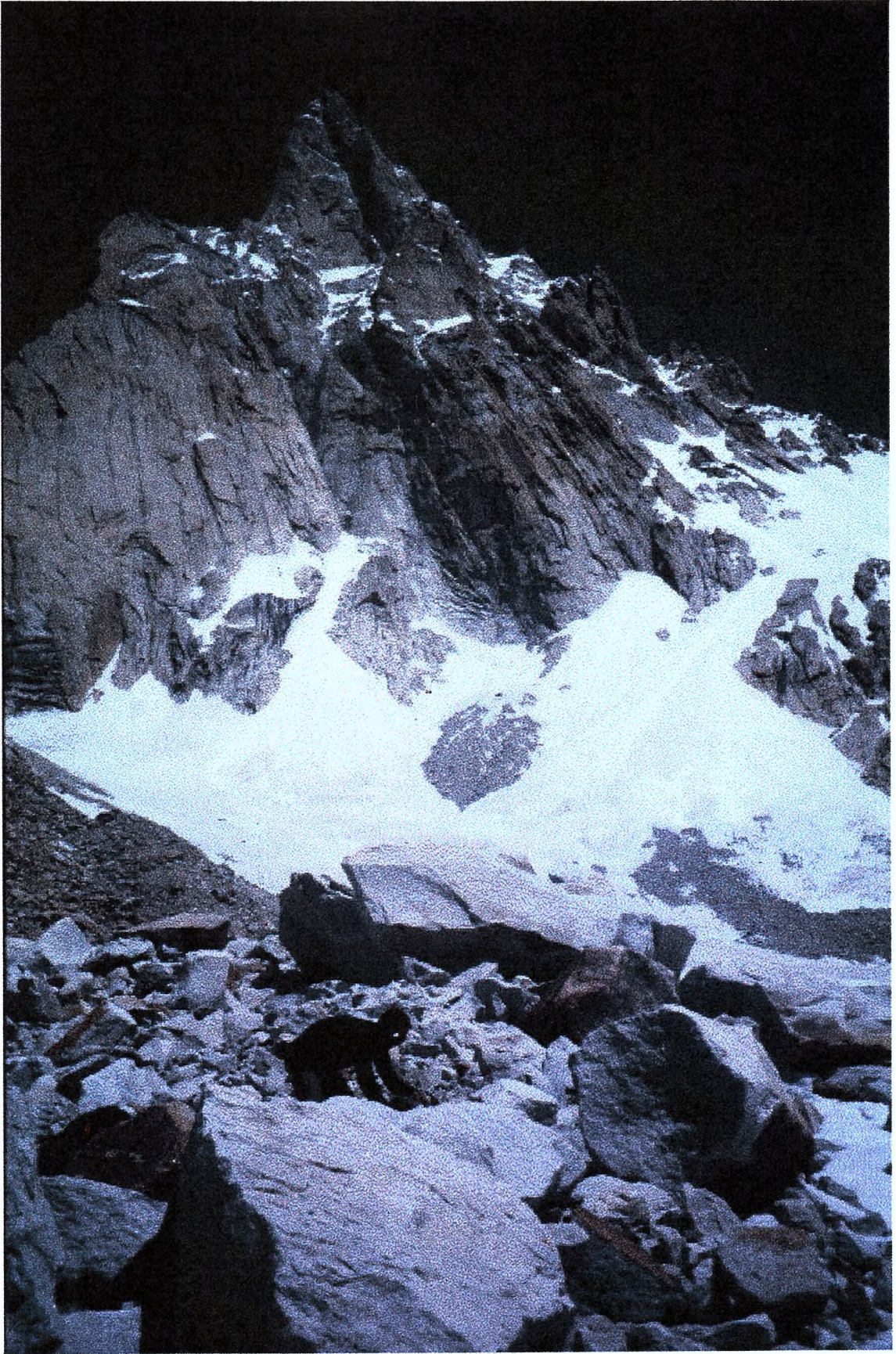
Sunday 27th	Walked on to Korophon.
Monday 28th	Walked on to Thongal (1 mile passed Askole which was cut off due to landslide.) Bathed in hot springs.
Tuesday 29th	Jeep Thongal to Skardu. Four jeep changes due to landslides & river flooding road.
Wednesday 30th	Left Skardu on 2 pm bus.
Thursday 31st	Arrived Islamabad at 1pm.
<u>August 1997</u>	
Friday 1st	Packing & carpet buying in Islamabad.
Saturday 2nd	Left Islamabad on early flight to London.

Weather and Conditions

We were told on the walk out, by a porter with pretty ropey English, that we had had the best **weather** in 30 years. Whether he meant 3 years or 13 or whatever doesn't matter, we definitely had very good weather. We never experienced what we would call a proper *storm*, as there were never really any high winds. It snowed on our arrival at basecamp for an afternoon and evening and about a week later it snowed for about 5 days. Other than that we only had a couple of days here and there of bad weather. After the first 5-day 'storm' it did not snow at basecamp, being too warm it would rain instead. There was always warning before bad weather arrived. About 24 hours before, streaky high level clouds (cirrus/alto cirrus??) would build up, coming over from the source of bad weather. Sometimes the bad weather would not arrive, but bad weather never arrived without this warning.

It is hot in the Karakorum, hotter than the Alps and hotter than the Tien Shan. Shorts and T shirt in basecamp (in good weather) and it was only whilst on Hanispur South climbing through the night early on in the trip that I wore my thermal top or ultrafleece salopettes. The average temperature definitely rose as time went by, which was glorious for rock (no socks or gloves required most of the time), but meant any ice/snow particularly below 5500m had to be done in the hours of darkness. Towards the end, night freezes were becoming a rarity, making the lower snow slope **conditions** dodgy and increasing the stonefall risk. This may be connected to having such good weather. There is a lot of very good quality rock in the Choktoi, but there is also some very loose rock too, though this is fairly obvious to spot. We found lots of cams very useful, including size 4 and 5 Camalots. The snow level rose significantly while we were there, maybe by 400m, and this meant that glacier conditions varied a lot throughout our stay. So some parts that were under solid snow early on, would become time consuming as the snow disappeared and snowbridges weakened etc.

Plate 1: Peak 6166m(Choktoi Peak?) from the high camp, looking at the S/SE face.



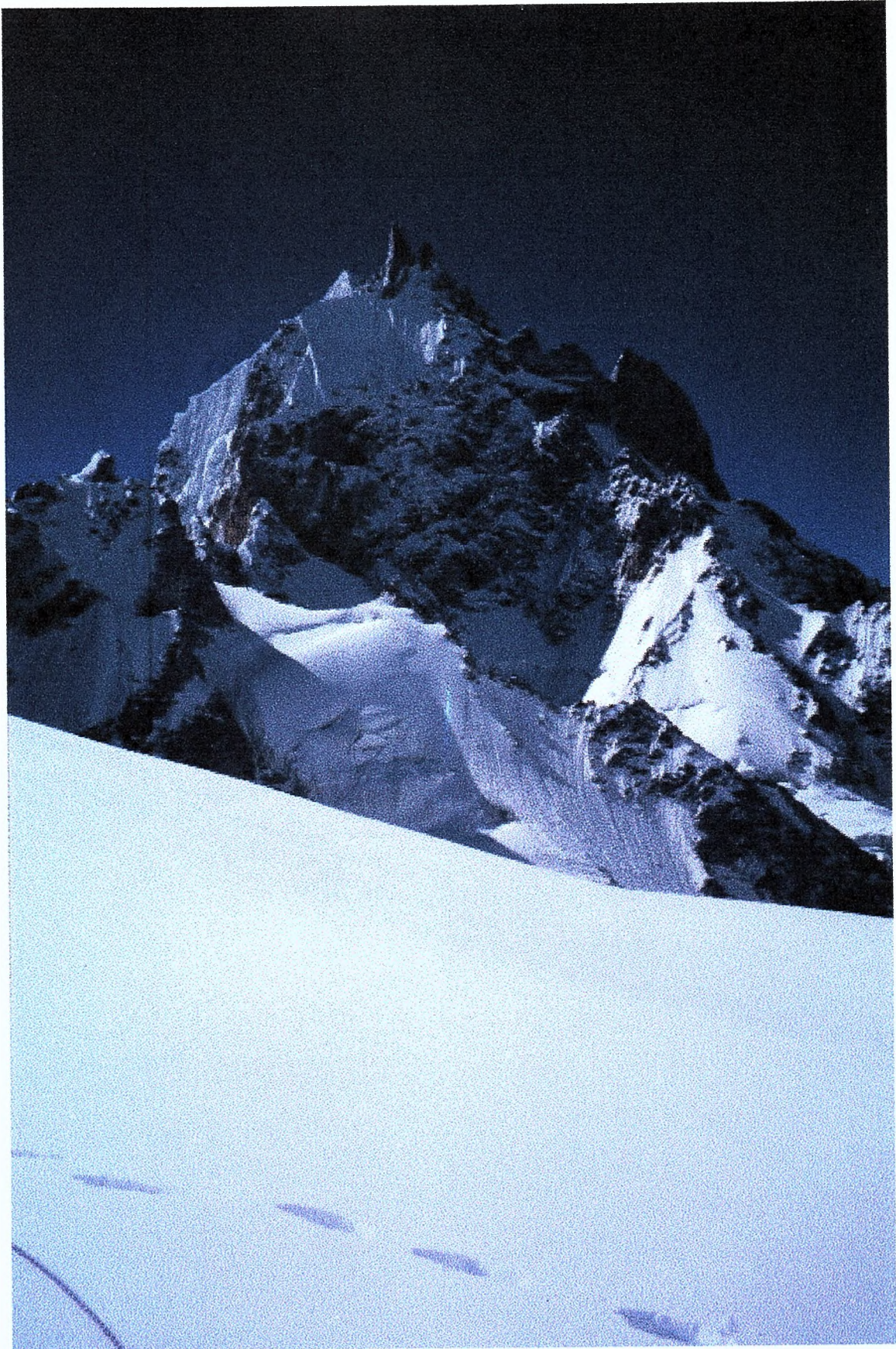


Plate 2: Hanipispur South from the approach glacier above the high camp. This is a view of the SE face, the snow slopes and gulleys we climbed are off picture on the right, and brought us onto the right hand skyline ridge (North ridge).

The Climbs

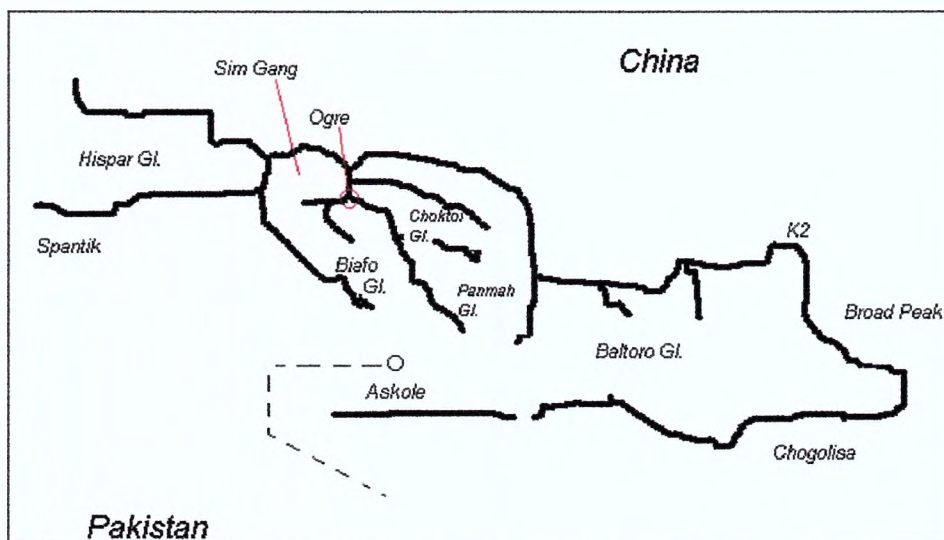
Peak 6166m (Choktoi Peak?), Alex and Will

Situated on the north side of the Choktoi Glacier, on the 'ridge' running SE from Hanipispur South, this peak was named Trinity peak due to its three rock spires on top. It is visible from well down the Choktoi, and has a stunning profile from the south and west, presenting a formidable rock ridge. Approached up glacier to SE of peak, 6 hr slog up steep scree slope with greenery all around. Evidence of a lot of animals, probably marmot and ibex, and heard marmots whistling.

Soon we realised that the rock ridge was going to be unfeasibly hard to get on to, and not much easier to climb - everywhere on it looked blank. Found a decent camp spot at about 5000m, complete with spectacular views over the Choktoi and Panmah Glaciers. Some avalanche debris at the base of the S face, but with a clear line up a snow slope up to a col to the E. Went up to near the col early to have look at possible lines up, and spotted what looked to be a continuous gully running up the E face. Couldn't see above about 5600m, where the 'gully' disappeared behind the rib on the SE, but the line seemed to continue to a col between two summit towers. This was to be our line of attack.

We started at 10pm the following night, traveling light with only a down jacket, chocolate bars and a litre of water each. Made good progress up to the base of the SE pillar, one ice pitch crossing a rock step, and then back onto snow and into the gully we had seen. Reached 5800m with little technical climbing apart from the ice, and were then faced with a steep rock wall. Climbed one hard mixed pitch (Scottish 5/6?), but with no sign of the ground ahead easing, placed a peg and abseiled back to the start of the pitch. 3 hard aid pitches later, and we were back next to the peg I had placed 3 hours earlier, but with the sun now well on the way. We had planned to find a safe spot to sit and wait for the sun to disappear again, but no such site was immediately obvious, and with debris beginning to whistle past, retreat was the best option. Could not take the easiest line back down, because of the softness of the snow, so abseiled down rock slabs to the final snow slope.

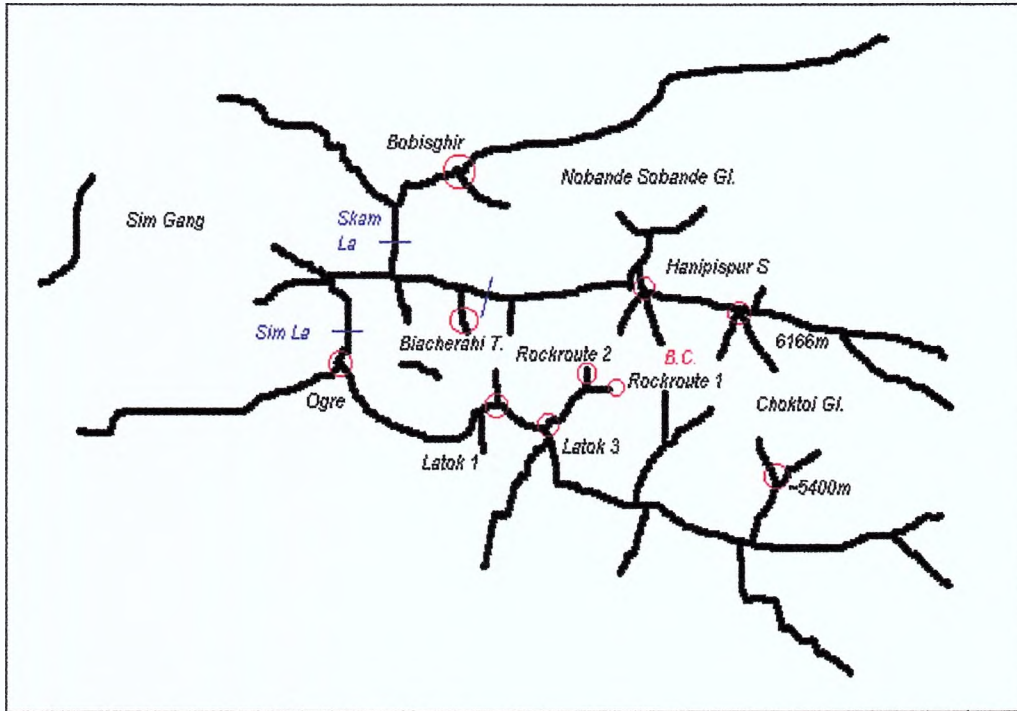
Due to a lack of food and no spare head-torch up at this camp (mine smashed by falling debris earlier that day), a second attempt immediately was not possible, but with a slightly different approach (up the ridge leading to the col to the E) this peak could provide excellent technical climbing over a couple of days.



Map 1: Sketch map of Pakistan Karakoram to show general location of the expedition.

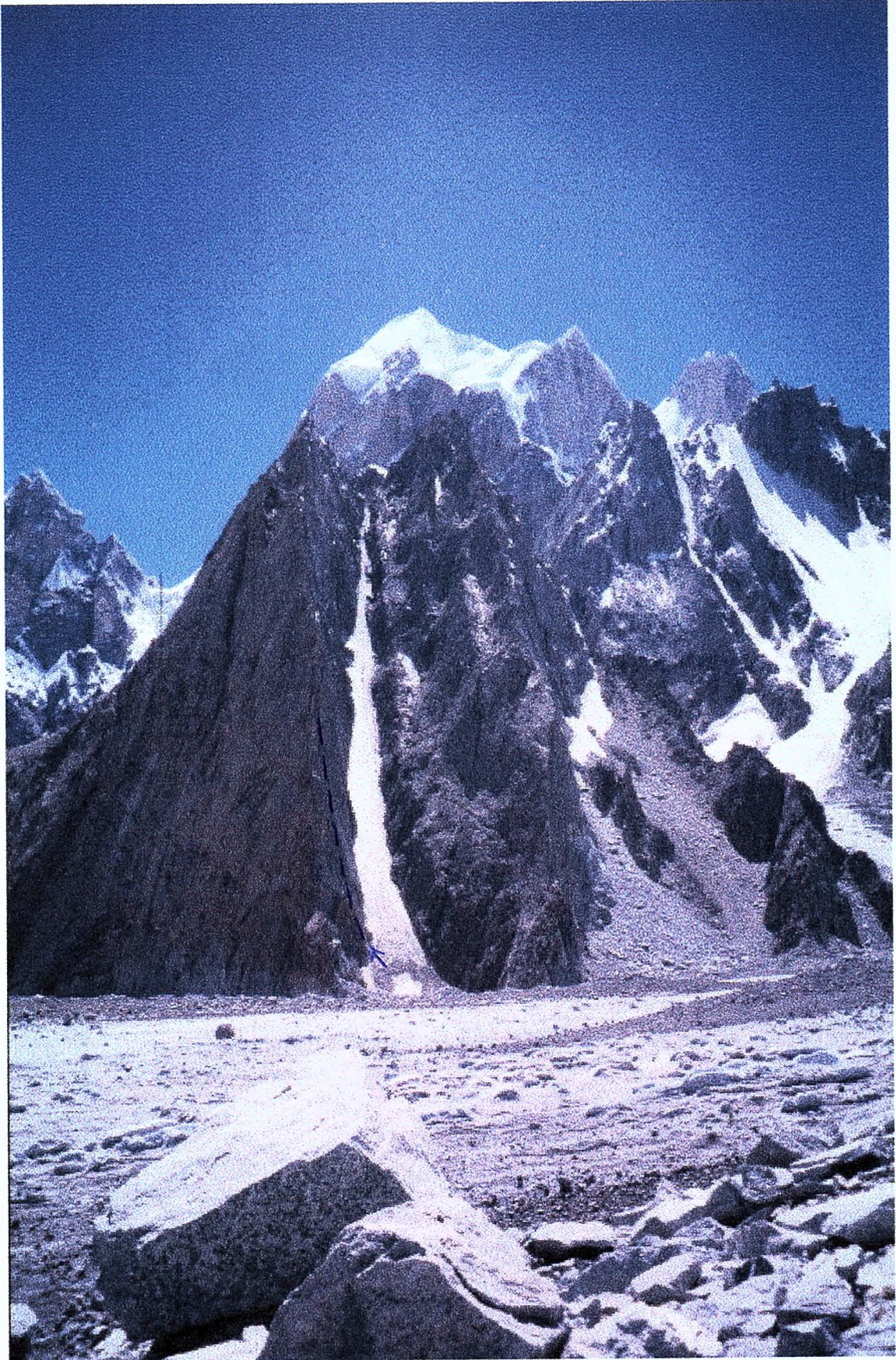
Hanispur South (6047m), Will, Colin, Fi and Guy

This climb was the main objective of the trip and we all wanted to give it a bash. A slog up the scree slope behind basecamp to the glacier brought us to a good camp spot at 5000m or so. Alex was thwarted with an unnecessarily long bout of diarrhoea, confining him to the tent at 5000m. The first attempt was quite comical really, if bordering on incompetent (bordering?). Colin, Fi and Guy set off at 10:30pm or so to slog up the glacier (pre-recced) and then on up the lower snow slopes of the SE face. We then proceeded up one of the snowy gullies that would take us onto the summit ridge North of the summit – or so we thought. The gully got decidedly steep and then brought us onto a buttress, which we followed for a few pitches, hoping this too would join the summit ridge. Dawn arrived and it was apparent that we were going nowhere fast. Colin kept going up the rock for a pitch but informed us that the route ahead was going to be hard, particularly in plastics and minimal rock rack. We retreated quickly to avoid the rapidly destabilising snow slopes and Guy got very hungry. Our second attempt showed that that buttress did not join the summit ridge at all, just stopping in mid air instead! Our second attempt was much more professional. We set off at 10pm (Colin+Fi and Will+Guy) making fast progress up the glacier and snow slopes, this time going the right way. The snow conditions were a nightmare with breakable crust (under almost full body



Map 2: Sketch map of the expedition area showing locations of basecamp(B.C.), routes, peaks and cols.

weight) over deep snow, however we reached the summit ridge, after a little steeper ice, in good time. At this point we froze – almost to death if it wasn't for our **Consoltex** jackets – because it was cold and windy. We continued up the ridge easily at first, steering clear of the ugly looking cornice, until it steepened significantly and we had to cross a bewildering (for Guy at least) bergschrund. The last hundred metres had been pretty hellish, with very deep snow meaning that only a trench digging type exercise could end in progress. However, despite enjoying the healthy exercise, it was apparent that the snow was not in the best possible nick. A further km (or so it seemed) up the steepening snow ridge/slope and it was clearly getting unjustifiably dangerous and despite being able to see the summit no more than a couple of rope lengths ahead, the decision to retreat was easy and unanimous. Again Guy got very hungry on the way down, and Colin got cold too – but that was because he wasn't wearing his **Consoltex** jacket. We were rewarded for our efforts, though, with a stunning sunrise illuminating peak 6166m.



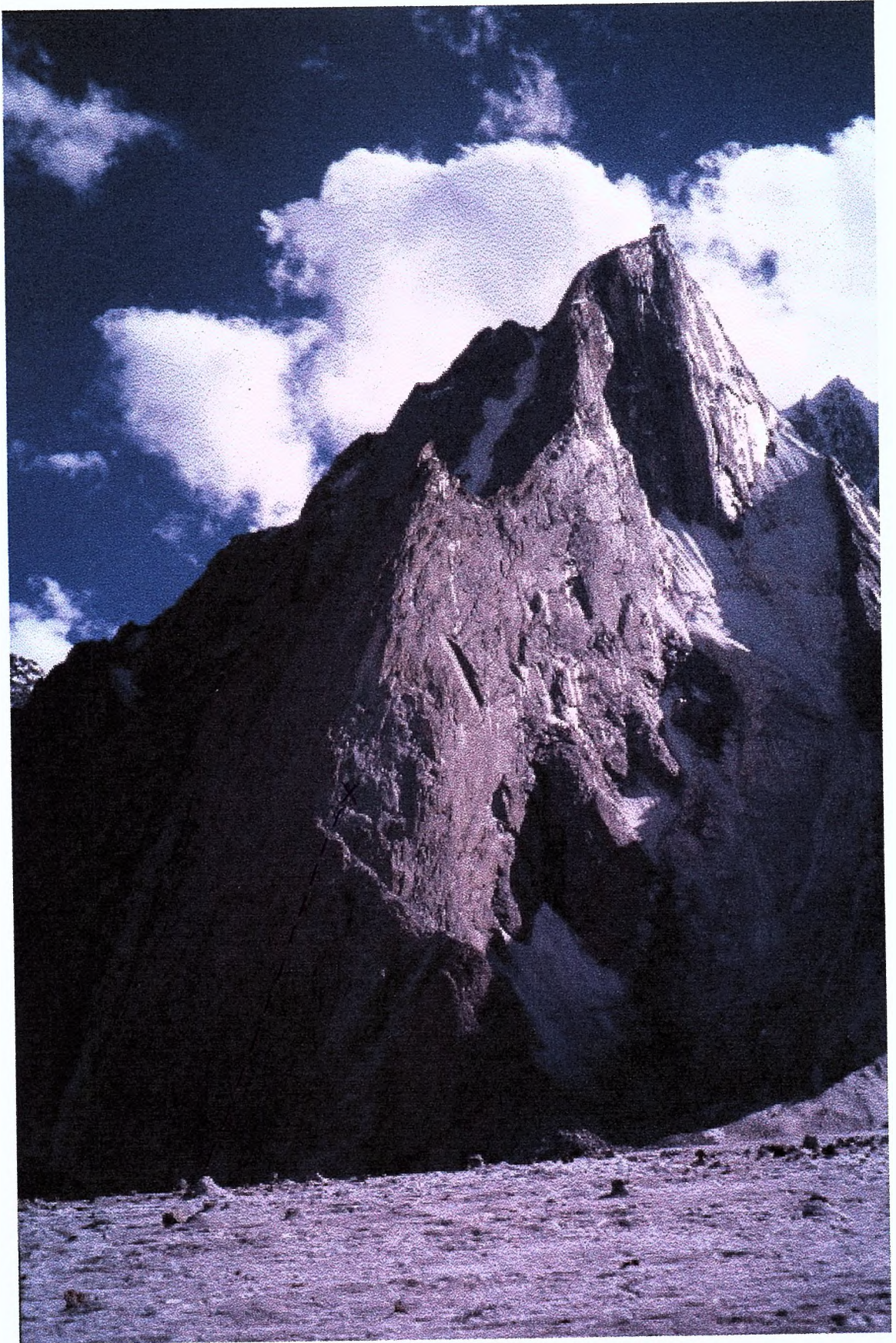


Plate 3: Rock route 1 (Doug Scott spur) seen from basecamp. The Line we took starts on the right side of the arete facing us and meets the arete about a third or so of the way up.

Plate 4: Rock route 2 seen from middle of Choktoi glacier. First couple of pitches or so are not seen due to a rise in the glacier. We reached the sunlit light patch just above the point where a minor ridge comes in from the right.

Peak ~5400m, Fi and Guy

This peak has a very pleasant looking NW ridge descending from the summit to a snow slope and then on to a grassy shoulder and slope down to the Choktoi glacier. We bivvied on the grassy shoulder, which was a real treat after a month or more with out greenery. So it was a struggle to get up at 2am (at least it was after midnight for once) and head of up a bit of scree and then frozen scree to the snow slopes. To get on to the ridge proper, we had to do about 100m of easy but very loose climbing on the far (SW) side of the snow field. We then picked our way through boulder fields and across small snow slopes to reach a point on the ridge from where we would be able to traverse all the way to the summit. We had grossly misjudged the distance and how long it would take, and despite moving quickly, only reached the start of the proper traverse at about dawn. We dumped sacks and set of at high speed to reach the summit before the snow was zapped. The climbing was easy, but always very loose and sometimes really quite airy, as we were forced onto the tottering blocks balanced on the crest by deteriorating snow conditions. Endless false summits (much to Guy's irritation and Fi's amusement) brought us the to top in outrageous heat. Fortunately, as it turned out, all the dodgy snow bits were either protectable or avoidable, however descending proved an ordeal all of its own. Due to the instability of both the snow and the rock, we felt obliged to abseil much of the route. This meant something in the order of 20 abseils as we only had one rope. We had to use all our tat, slings and hexes and all but 3 nuts. We retrieved our sacks and then headed back to the bivvy spot, arriving at about 3pm, amazed at how long the route had been and chuffed at making the first, and only first ascent of the trip.

Rock Route 1, Fi, Will and Guy

Opposite basecamp there was a stunning triangular rockface with a pinnacle summit, which then joined onto (eventually) other rocky peaks/spurs coming down from the complex bulk of Latok III. We set off up the north face of this peak, up stunning granite, hoping to join onto the NE ridge about half way up or so. We were hoping to find some aid cracks, as we had done very little aiding previously, and couldn't think of a better place to teach ourselves – after all we had all read bits of Big Walls! by John Middendorf. It began with a couple of nice VS pitches, starting at a ramp leading in from the right, and then from the large ledge leading up and right up some splendid cracks in a corner system, to another ledge. The next pitch involved free and aid climbing at VS and A1, starting up left to some hanging blocks and then right up these and beyond to a belay. Next followed mostly aid up a diagonal crack that probably could have been mostly freed

but we wanted the practice(!) to a belay at the bottom of a vertical corner. This too was all aid, with the placements getting more dubious and sparse once above the corner (A1/2). Belay below a crack and chimney. This pitch went free with a bit of a grunt up the chimney. We were now probably a pitch or two below the ridge, where we hoped the climbing would be all free and fast. However, it was clear that we would not be able to reach the summit and get down that day, so without bivvy kit and with it being our day off we retreated to basecamp for a massive jappati rice and dal supper. Throughout all this we had had some excellent jumarring practice, we also learnt a lot about leap frogging cams and lowering off to retrieve needed but already used bits of kit! After discussion with the Sheffield bunch, it turned out to be a variation of the 'Doug Scott Spur'.

Rock Route 2, Guy and Will

This was a last minute choice of route. We had spent 3 days trying to get established at the bottom of a stunning buttress just round the corner, but had been thwarted by massive crevasses, an awkward icefall and then poor freezing not allowing safe progress up some hanging snowslopes which lead to the bottom of the buttress proper. So, disappointed, we looked at another close by alternative and decided on trying to find a way up this stunning rock face opposite the Sheffield Basecamp. We had a latish start as we had just returned from looking at the hanging snowslopes and decided to go with one person leading and the second jumarring with a pack containing a couple of days supplies. The start of the route was just to the right of a right facing corner in the centre of the steep face looking directly over the Choktoi towards the Sheffield basecamp. After an initial quality pitch at about HVS, it started to rain lightly and the sky was looking decidedly threatening. After humping the pack to that belay, we decided to leave it there and go fast and light for as long as the weather would let us. The climbing proved to be sustained and interesting, with about half the pitches at E2 and none easier than HVS. 300m of grooves and cracks, one tension traverse, an offwidth (2x#5 camalot belay!) and a lot of excavating to find nut slots and wobbly flake placements brought us to our high point in heavier rain, where the route ahead was becoming harder to work out and certainly technically more difficult. We descended in the deteriorating conditions and Will enjoyed the prussiking practice to retrieve the stuck ropes. The ropes also jammed on the final abseil, but we left it for the following day as we were going to be late for supper as it was.

The Colls

Biacherahi Coll

26th June 1997 (Alex & Fiona)

We left the camp at point 4554m at 4 am and set off up the glacier to the north east of the Biacherahi tower. The frozen snow underfoot made travelling easy and even the few

crevasses on the lower section were easy to negotiate. We walked up and around to the right where there was a fairly gradual route to the back of the coll.

The lowest point of the coll has a fairly steep back wall with a large Bergschrund and so we made our way around the back of the glacier over to a point about 200m higher and 500m west of the lowest point. At the top there was a fairly large gaping crevasse but with a snow bridge that was easy enough to belay each other over.

18th July 1997 (Alex & Fiona)

We left base camp at 6.30 pm to walk up to the point at 4554m which we reached at about 9pm. The glacier to the north east of the Biacherahi tower was completely dry revealing a ridiculous number of complicated crevasses. We wound our way over snow bridges and between crevasses, jumping where necessary. Both of us went in at some stage, Alex to the extent of hanging freely!

The glacier resembled nothing like how it had been the previous month when it had been an easy walk up on good neve. We still went up to the right and around the back of the basin to the same point west of the lowest point of the coll. We reached the top of the coll at 1 am and were able to belay each other over the same snow bridge as before.

The descent into the Nobande-Sobande glacier was a very gentle snow slope down. However it was threatened by very large seracs on the west side and the amount of avalanche debris that we passed meant we moved quite far on before pitching the tent.

Skam La

19th July 1997 (Alex & Fiona)

We set off at 2 am from our camp on the Nobande-Sobande, just north east of the Biacherahi tower. It was a gradual climb on good frozen snow. There are a few huge crevasses but each with a well-placed and easily negotiable snow bridge. At the top of the coll there is a ridge with a few crevasses & towers but they are easy enough to negotiate.

The descent into the Sim Gang is a snow slope of about 50°. It was fairly straightforward down climbing but took some time due to a thick layer of loose large crystals. We were happy to be off the slope by the time the sun hit the glacier but even in the early hours the slope was less stable than we would have liked.

Sim La

27th June 1997 (Alex & Fiona)

We left point 4554m at midnight in very bright moonlight so torches were not necessary. The walk was straight forward on good neve up the Choktoi and to the right around 'the lump' in front of the Ogre. Once over the first coll (north of 'the lump'), the broken Sim

La pass is visible at the back of a large crevassed basin. We traversed around to the right cautiously as there was continuous rock fall off the ridge to our right.

We climbed up the right hand side of the coll on a ridge of good neve. We reached the top at 4.45am just as the sun was beginning to rise and so had good views down on the broken coll, on down the Sim Gang and across up to the Ogre to the south. The descent back down the same way was straight forward and we then crossed around the other side of 'the lump' to the east of the Ogre. The Choktoi was snow covered down to the point 4554m.

14th July 1997 (Guy & Fiona)

We left base camp mid morning to walk up the Choktoi towards the Sim La. The glacier was wet at around the 4554m point, but not snow covered until we were around the corner, just north east of 'the lump'. By mid afternoon the snow was soft & knee deep and so we stopped to camp just north of 'the lump', just before an avalanche-threatened stretch.

We set off again at 2 am the following morning. The snow had more or less frozen but there were crevasses every couple of metres, which meant breaking through the crust up to knee height. This delayed us considerably and consequently we were only at the base of the Sim La by 4.30am. With the sun rising within half an hour we decided to pitch camp and attempt to cross the pass the following night.

Setting off at 3 am we were able to climb on good neve up the same ridge as before on the right of the broken coll. Just 20m or so from the highest point of the ridge there was an easy walk around to the left, over a small easy Bergshrund and onto the Sim Gang glacier which stretched away at a very gradual angle.

We crossed back over the pass that evening at 11pm. The approach to the coll from the Sim Gang was tedious and lengthy due to a frozen crust over 5 inches of soft snow. The descent from the coll was easy because the steep north east side was frozen.

23rd July 1997 (Alex & Fiona)

We approached the pass from the Sim Gang having walked around from the Skam La. The area around the bifurcation of the Sim Gang was very difficult under foot. The warmer conditions, compounded by two days of snowfall meant that every other footstep went thigh deep. The actual approach to the coll was not too bad. We camped 100m or so on the Sim Gang side & left to cross the coll at 4am. The descent was again easy on firm snow.

We continued down from the basin on the glacier on the north side of 'the lump'. There was now no snow on this glacier and so it was easy to jump the frequent dry crevasses.

Further Possible Objectives

Clearly there are still all the routes that we tried and did not get up! On top of this, there is a lot of very good unclimbed rock here, including the Biacherahi group, a thousand-plus metre spur on a minor peak off Latok III and the South West ridge of Choktoi Peak, to name a few. Hanispur South (6047m) is still unclimbed, as is Choktoi peak (6166m). Most of the sub-6000ers in the Choktoi are still unclimbed (please check with the Sheffield expedition led by Mark Harris, as they may have done a few). We have lots of photos of these possibilities.

We spotted a possible line up the North side of Latok III, though this looked very hard and would still leave you with a day or so traversing a snow ridge to the summit. We checked out the North Face of the Ogre and have photos of that as well.

There is still quite a lot of rubbish left on the Choktoi by past expeditions and I would urge anyone going there to devote a day or two to clearing it up and portering it out. Think ahead and 'order' one or two extra porters for extra rubbish you may find.

The mountains here really are amazing – beautiful, steep and dramatic. I thoroughly recommend going.

Expedition Logistics

Travel to and from Pakistan

We flew with Pakistan International Airways (PIA) from Heathrow to Islamabad direct for about £500, bookable direct from PIA (see useful addresses), and were given a permitted baggage allowance of 45kg (normally allowed 23kg) each. We were warned that we would not get this extra allowance on the way back, but in fact we took more back than out and were not charged a thing, thanks to a little sweet talking.

Tour Agencies

Definitely use one of these agencies. We used Himalaya Treks and Tours and were very pleased with them and they cut out a load of hassle for us. They cost US\$300 for 5 of us and supplied us with a cook/guide (who was 90% ready equipped), organised all our internal transport, briefings, hotels, porter insurance and help sort out permits. They also met us at the airport. They can also act as freight handlers. They are invaluable and cheap.

Food and Fuel

We bought all our food locally, except chocolate. This worked out well, saving weight on the plane and most things were cheap (some imported food was quite dear). Please see separate food chart for details. We bought nearly all of it in Islamabad, but in future would get 90% in Skardu, about the same price and almost the same choice and it means you can fly to Skardu without 400 tons of food. We ordered Epigas through Frontier Services (Dai Lampard) and picked them up in Skardu. We also took a 70 litres of kerosene for the basecamp mega stove and some petrol for MSR's, if the gas did not work out but it did.

Money

The local currency is Rupee, at about 65 to the pound. Take US\$ out there rather than pounds as they are more widely accepted (~42R = \$1). We took cash and saved a wedge in commission and would do that again.

Insurance

We all used BMC Sunpeak insurance – please inform the British Embassy in Islamabad of your insurance details and itinerary.

Helicopter Bond

If only doing sub-6000ers and hence only requiring a trekking permit, you do not pay an environment bond or a helicopter bond, but you can if you want.

Visas

These cost about £30 and can be obtained through the post quite quickly from the embassy in London or Bradford.

Permits, Guides etc.

The Choktoi is a government 'restricted area' and so it is necessary to have a trekking permit and government approved guide (can be supplied by your tour agency), even if sticking to below 6000m. If climbing a peak over 6000m, a peak fee must be paid and permission applied for by the end of December the previous year. You will also need a Liaison Officer and a Cook. There are many rules and regulations to do with wages, equipment, etc., which should be looked into before going. More information from the BMC. Or give me a call.

Porters

These chaps are a laugh! Your guide should organise them for you, once he knows how many you need (they carry 25kg of your kit each). Expect to have a Sirdar who basically is a chief porter who gets paid the same as a porter but does not have to carry anything. On the walk in we had a very good Sirdar who did carry a load and when a porter got injured he carried the extra weight! Discuss wages with your guide/agent beforehand. Ask about their cost, return cost, rest day allowance, meat allowance, equipment allowance. Askole to Choktoi basecamp is 9 stages and we paid 2100R/porter for the walk in in total. The porters were all 'adequately' equipped and so we paid them an allowance instead of actually supplying stuff for them (saves us buying it and them selling it again!). Likewise with food. Take enough paracetamol and disinfectant to treat porters with cut feet, sore knees etc. Placebo is useful as well. We had 26 porters on the way in and 13 on the way out. We carried 25-30kg on the way in but virtually nil on the way out. We would recommend buying extra kerosene and stoves for the porters (you will probably have to insist on it) to use as they are otherwise quite keen to deforest the place.

Islamabad to Skardu

The flight cost has doubled this year to US\$50 one way, refundable if not used. It is definitely worth it as it takes 1 hour instead of 24 hours of death defying antics on the Karakorum Highway. It is, however, weather dependant and if there has been a few days of bad weather you are unlikely to get on your 'booked' flight as they clear the back log first. We hired a minibus through our agents on the way in, which cost a similar amount to the flight, as we could not fly with 500kg of food etc. We took the public transport bus back to Islamabad at the end which was exciting and cheap (£6ish), leaving once a day. It gets very booked up when the weather is bad – goodness knows why, the KKH is even more lethal in the wet!

Skardu to Askole

We took 2 4wd jeeps, one for kit and porters and one for us and guide. They were organised through the tour agents, at about \$70 per jeep. It takes about 7-8 hours on a clear road (more likely early in the season), or maybe a couple of days apparently when the road is blocked a number of times by landslides. An early morning start is recommended so that the rivers are not too high. It is common for there to be some blockages and hence some delay. We had none on the way out and about 4 on the way back, there is not much delay if there are jeeps between the blockages (usually is) but can take forever if you have to manhandle everything between blocks. Take enough Rupees to pay the intermediate jeep drivers, who will charge you on the spot.

The Walk In and Out

The walk in took 4 days and the walk out took 3. On the last day of the walk in, make sure at least one of you is in front of the porters as they will try and stop as soon as

possible, but if you are in front they will keep going and you will get to the basecamp you want. There are numerous possible basecamp sites on the moraine on the North side of the glacier, as far up as the toe of the Biacherahi Tower group. Basecamp is at about 4400m, and there are plenty of glacial streams, watch your choice of water source if others are camped further up the glacier.

Maps

The best maps are probably those published by the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research. They are a 1:250 000 orographical sketch map of the Karakorum split into 2 sheets. They go at about £17 from Stamfords in London (they do mail order). The Choktoi is on sheet 1.

Kitchen Equipment

We bought a pressure cooker, a couple of big pots, a mega kerosene stove, frying pan, rolling pin and board (for japattis), a paraffin lamp and hired a large communal basecamp tent/kitchen tent. All of which were brilliant and wouldn't do without them again! They are all cheap, and can be bought in Skardu.

Food list for Choktoi Expedition 1997

We bought all food in Pakistan, bar the chocolate. This is simply a list of what we ate because it was available in Rawalpindi at the time.

We basically split the expedition days into two - Climbing or Basecamp days and tried to keep the easier/lighter/more calorific food for the climbing days. Most of our calculations were originally based on six people & then altered to five (As Rich could no longer come). It all became even more empirical when we added in the fact that Colin was leaving early & Ghulam was going to be at base camp for the whole time. We then realised that we would be providing for Ghulam too, so we were back to catering for 6! For these reasons I have not broken the lists down too much.

Total Inventory of food bought in Rawalpindi

We bought all this in one of the grocery shops & although he didn't have all that we wanted in stock he always knew where to acquire it from. The amounts in brackets are the quoted price & the amounts in the right hand column are the amounts that we actually paid after a bit of bargaining.

	<u>Rupees</u>
Stock cubes (72 cubes @ 9.5 rup for two)	600
Teabags (6 x boxes @ 87 rup per box)	500
Milk powder (6 tins of 2.5 kg)	3000
Coffee (3 jars @ 620 rup per jar)	1000
Cocoa powder (5 jars)	500
Tang (2 big tins @ 620 rup & one jar @ 118 rup)	1280

Jam (3 tins @ 70 rup per tin)	190
Marmalade (one pot @ 280 rup)	260
Custard powder (40 boxes @ 24 rup per box)	880
Jelly (20 pckts @ 22 rup each)	360
Pineapple (40 tins @ 50 rup per tin)	1900
Sweetcorn (6 tins @ 65 rup per tin)	348
Olives (6 tins)	600
Tomato paste (13 tins @ 50 rup per tin)	595
Cheese (50 tins @ 55 rups per tin) [<i>1 tin = 6 md</i>]	2500
Tuna (36 tins @ 60 rup per tin) [<i>1 tin = 2md</i>]	2000
Sardines (20 tins @ 22 rups per tin) [<i>1 tin = 2md</i>]	400
Noodles (15 pckts @ 15 rups per pckt) [<i>1 pckt = 8 md</i>]	200
Almonds (5kg)	1600
Pistachio (4kg)	1120
Dates (2kg)	80
Sultanas (13 kg)	975

Total amount of food bought in Skardu

Sugar (30kg sack @ 25 rup per kg)	
Lentils (15 kg @ 30 - 35 rups per kg depending on type)	500
Porridge oats (5 tins @ 80 each) [<i>1 tin = 10md</i>]	400
Kisan Wheat porridge (20 boxes @ 25 rups per box) [<i>1 box = 8md</i>]	500
Chinese noodles (20 pckts @ 15 per pckt) [<i>1pcket = 2md</i>]	300
Rice (20kg)	600
Oil (6 litres)	380
Flour (25 kg @ 10 rup per kg)	

[md means man-days]

We also bought:

Fuel kerosene (50 litres)
petrol (10 litres)
gas (ordered from UK)

Kerosene pressure lamp

Kerosene burning cooker

Pressure cooker

Salt, spices, herbs.

Onions, garlic.

Peanut butter.

Honey.

Powdered soups.

Chocolate (4 x boxes of 48 bars brought out from UK) 192 bars

Comments

We also bought a selection of packets of biscuits from a variety of shops. Lots of the biscuits have cummin (*zeera*) in them & it didn't take long for the novelty to wear off. In total we had about 150 packets of sweet/savory biscuits for day food.

Custard powder was bought on the understanding that a) it made nice custard, b) a packet made up 2 litres & c) everyone wanted to eat custard every night. In reality, a packet made up about 10 litres of really unpleasant luminous coloured stuff & consequently no one wanted to eat any of it. Sadly we even had trouble trying to burn it!

We didn't use half the jellies that we bought as they were quite difficult to set .

The packets of powdered soups were very expensive & not very nice. Stock cubes were much better value with more flavour.

The tins of Quaker oats made really good porridge but we couldn't buy enough which is why we bought the Kisan wheat porridge which was a disappointing sloppy, watery excuse for porridge.

We bought too much dried fruit & nuts though most people liked it. Not one of the dates were eaten (very dry) & some of the almonds had maggots in.

Peanut butter, honey & tins of pineapple & olives were real winners; the sweetcorn wasn't too good but made a very nice pasta/tuna/sweetcorn bake, and allowed accurate measurement of the time food spent in the alimentary canal.

In summary, we had more food than we needed but this was partly due to the fact that we would eat Dahl, chapatis & rice most evenings we were at base camp.

Basecamp food basically included things like rice, dal/lentils, japattis, whereas climbing food included things such as noodles, biscuits, dried fruit and chocolate. We calculated the amount to buy of each item based on how many mountain days we thought we would have.

Ghulam was very useful in helping to choose some of the food, particularly the better quality dal and rice etc. Make sure you give your cook/guide a choice in the food as well, as he also has to eat it. He won't want any pork!

Take as much fresh veg as you can, as it seems to keep OK. But, beware the ravens – store in big plastic barrels and air the food when necessary.

Plastic barrels are very useful for carrying food and squashable things as the porters can be a little rough with the loads. We took 10, which was about right. They cost about US\$10 each, should be cleaned out before use and labelled so you know what is in each. Bear in mind that the barrels themselves weigh about 2-3kg each when empty.

Equipment report

Pakistan is HOT.

Clothing

I only used a thermal top a couple of times high on Hanipispur at night early in the trip. Otherwise I climbed in T-shirt and light fleece if necessary and light weight nylon trousers. Scottish winter type stuff is fine, plus a duvet because of the added luxury, when the weather is bad or early in the season, up to 6000m or so anyway.

Hardware

We found camming devices (including #4 and #5 camalots!) extremely useful on the rock routes that we tried. We also used a fair number of assorted pegs. Otherwise just a normal rack would suffice.

Fuel

We used gas mostly in the mountains/on routes, and kerosene at basecamp. This worked very well, once we had mastered the most efficient way of using the gas. We worked on one cylinder (250s) lasting 2 people 1 day, even if melting snow for water. We ordered this through 'Frontier'.

Millet Rucsacs

Designed by Walter Cecchinell and French made. These proved to be comfortable load carrying sacs with very good top flap design and comfortable waist belt that does up tight enough for thin people.

Consoltex Jackets

These jackets were absolutely fine and in fact far exceeded what was required of them. Although most of the time the good weather meant that we did not have to use them, when we did we were all pleased with them and felt safe as houses. The fabrics used are heavy duty, yet easy to move in and certainly very good for atrocious weather. We felt they would be ideal for Scottish winter use and the like, where garments take a heck of a beating. Look out for their label....

Medical Report

We experienced no significant medical problems on this trip, however there are a few things that are worth noting.

1. Remember to take enough basic medical kit to cater for the porters on the way in and out – stuff for headaches, twisted ankles etc, snowblindness, disinfecting cuts and so on. This roughly translates as lots of paracetamol/ibuprofen, ibuleve or voltarol gel type stuff (arnica), amethocaine eye drops, spare sunglasses, betadine (or similar), plenty of bandages and dressings and plasters and flamazine is also very useful. Some ailments will probably be beyond the scope of the average expedition; for example we had a porter who seemed to develop a degree of heart failure as we got higher! Antibiotic treatment is a moot point, as clearly they do not work as well at altitude, and clearly there is likely to be some compliance problems with the porters. However, they are very reluctant to turn back before the job is done and not treating a deep cut on a bare foot, that already has signs of infection, could mean that he is unable to do other jobs this season. My view is to take extra for the porters.
2. Altitude sickness is a very real problem and is at best unpleasant, at worst fatal. Make sure you read about it, so that you can recognise the symptoms when they arise and make sure you take the appropriate drugs with you and know when to use them and their limitations. Make sure you take them in the right preparation – there is no point in having dexamethasone tablets, for example, if the patient is vomiting as they will not stay down – intramuscular injection is the route of choice. I have found it useful to go through the medical kit with everyone, before the trip or at the start, so that everyone knows what things are for and how to give them. It is also useful to include, in the bottle, a list of symptoms and dose for use of a drug. E.g. for nifedipine I included a description of the symptoms of pulmonary oedema and the relevant number of pills to be taken and how often. This means that when every one is knackered fewer mistakes will be made.
3. Do not over do it on the walk in, as the gradual altitude gain makes losing height quite difficult. In fact the most dangerous time is probably just after reaching basecamp. If you rush up the mountain the following day and get cerebral oedema returning to basecamp may not be enough to get rid of it.
4. Don't forget haemorrhoid ointment, sudacrem type stuff or antifungal type cream. Rehydration sachets are very useful, e.g. dioralyte, though locally bought sachets taste much nicer.
5. There are lots of books with good advice on expedition medicine, including lists of what to take to base camp and what to carry with you on the hill etc. See useful addresses section of this report.

Expedition Accounts

Money In			
Sponsorship	Consoltex Group Inc.	\$6000	£3750
	BMC		£600
	MEF		£400
	Foundation for Sport and the Arts		£375
Personal	Flights	5x£516	£2580
	Contributions	5x£625	£3125
Interest			£20
Money Out			
In UK	Flights	5x£516	£2580
	Visas		£200
	Medicine		£24
	Communal Equipment	Ropes, hardware, bits and bobs.	£1630
	Gas Canisters		£370
	Peak Fees	Due to logistical and beaurocratic confusion and cock up	£746
	Insurance	5x£200	£1000
In Pakistan	Hotels, Jeeps, Buses, Food, Fuel, Cook/guide, Porters, Porter insurance, Kitchen Equipment, Agent Fee, etc.		£4300
Balance		Total In	£10,850
		Total Out	£10,850
			£0

Useful Addresses

1. Guy Willett, 2FR 7 Pitfour Street, Dundee DD2 2NU. (01382) 646 767.
guywillett@aol.com
2. UIAA Mountain Medicine Centre. Dr. C. Clarke, St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London EC1A 7BE. Useful information sheets and advice.
3. Himalaya Treks and Tours. Our agents in Pakistan, thoroughly recommendable. 112 Rahim Plaza, Murree Road, Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Tel. 0092-51-515371. Fax. 0092-51-563014. E-mail: nasir@himtt.sdnpk.undp.org
4. Frontier (for epigas 250 canisters). Ty Gwyn, Nant Peris, Gwynedd, Wales LL55 4UE. Tel. 01286 871184. Fax. 872171.
5. Medical reference:
Medicine for Mountaineering; Wilkerson J.A., 4th Ed., The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1992.
Expedition Medicine; Jenson Juel, 5th Ed., Expedition Advisory Centre, Royal Geographical Society, 1994.
6. The Alpine Club Library, 55 Charlotte road, London EC2A 3QT. 0171 613 0755.