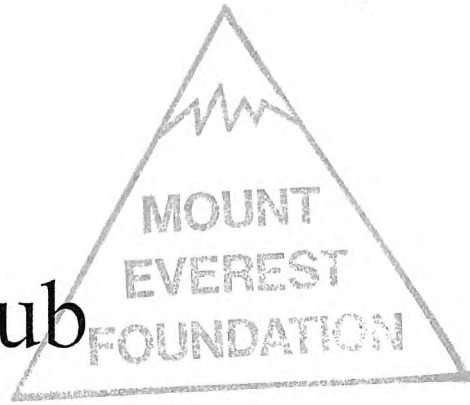


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The Pinnacle Club

Report of the
Karakoram Expedition
1997

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Pinnacle Club Karakoram Expedition 1997

Members:

Annabelle Barker
Pru Cartwright
Margaret Clennett
Sally Macintyre
Sue Williscroft

Objective

*To explore the area around the Shimshal Pass with
a view to climbing any feasible peaks.*

The Area

The Maidan Abdullah Khan is the area of ground approaching the Shimshal Pass. It is surrounded on both sides by peaks in the region of 5,500 to 6,000 metres. Only two of these had been climbed as far as we are aware: Mingli Sar, 6,000 m, has been climbed by Nazir Sabir and subsequently by various trekkers and the other un-named peak on the opposite side has been climbed by a German party. The area is the summer grazing ground of the Shimshali people, many of whom are resident in the summer village of Shuert from mid May to mid October.

The walk in is divided into 10 stages but takes 6 days since the first two stages are now done in 1½ hrs by jeep from Pasu. The walk in is very scenic, beginning in the deep gorge of the Shimshal river, eventually opening out with wonderful views of mountains in all directions. There is much scope for expeditions in the area, particularly up the various side glaciers.

Locals were extremely friendly, hospitable and helpful, as were the porters. Porter charges were 375 rupees per day. This included Wapassi. This is above the government rate. Anyone visiting the area needs to take care and time in negotiating these rates and the weight carried by the porters. We did not do this and it cost us dear: several of our porters were not carrying the standard 25 kg.

The Expedition

The team left Heathrow on Sat 29th July and flew to Rawalpindi. We had organised transport to Gilgit straight from the airport as we had a tight schedule and did not want to waste a day in Pindi: It cuts down on the risk of picking up infection and all necessary items of food and equipment can be bought in Gilgit at a more reasonable temperature! Fortunately we had several canisters of gas left over from a previous trip in the care of our cook, as this year, unlike in 1996, it was impossible to buy re-sealable gas tanks in Gilgit.

We stayed at the Hunza Tourist House, a pleasant, clean guest house near the river; the journey from Pindi up the Karakoram Highway having taken 15 hours in our pre-arranged, very comfortable wagon. The next day we met our cook/guide Mohammed Ibrahim, who has been with us on three previous trips and his assistant, Faisal Ali. Both men are from the Skardu area and we shopped with them in the bazaar for the necessary items of food and kitchen equipment we needed for the trip.

The following morning we went by wagon to Pasu, which took about 4 hours, the journey being interrupted for lunch at the rapidly expanding village of Karimabad. We stayed the night at the Pasu Inn from where we set off by jeep the next afternoon on our journey to base camp. At the end of the jeep road we met the Shimshali men who hang around the area seeking work as porters. Two of them had accompanied Annabelle Barker on a previous trip in 1986 and were desperately keen to come with us. We readily agreed to this as they had been excellent, but we failed to take into account the intervening eleven years and the fact that these were now old men (44 and 48, which is old by their standards) and could not carry full loads.

Walking began the next morning and we reached the village of Shimshal in two days, where we were warmly received and entertained to dinner. We camped in the "hotel" garden. Sue had developed a chest infection which was a recurring condition she had had for some months. Sue made the difficult but sensible decision to return home at this stage, realising that chest infections do not get better at altitude and can in fact prove life threatening.

Four more days of strenuous walking through wonderful country took us to our base camp on the Maidan Abdullah Khan at an altitude of 4,500 m. It is a beautiful place, surrounded by many attractive peaks most of which are unclimbed and about 6,000 m. There are two lakes on the Maidan and nearby is the Shimshal Pass, beyond which is the village of Shuwert where many Shimshalis spend the summer tending their vast flocks of yaks, sheep and goats. We were entertained twice daily by this huge herd of yaks streaming past our tents on their way to and from their grazing areas.

Paying off our porters proved an absolute nightmare as there was a huge argument over rates of pay and numbers of men. Threats were made to kill our guide/cook and to abandon us by refusing to come back and help carry on the way out. After a great deal of what they called discussion, but what we called an enormous row, an amicable settlement was made and the porters left smiling and happy, while we were upset, distressed and exhausted by it all. The lesson learnt, albeit expensively, was to weigh every man's load every day and agree on a price. We had employed a Sirdar to do this but he proved absolutely useless. How one determines the effectiveness of a Sirdar before he is employed remains an unanswered question.

We had ten days at base camp and began to make the most of it the next day by walking up a nearby hill to 5,000 m as part of our acclimatisation programme. The following evening we bivouacked at 5,000 m on the slopes of Mingli Sar, a 6,000 m trekkers peak, with a view to climbing it the next day. However, a sudden storm put paid to our efforts and we retreated from the mountain at 5.30 am the next day having gained very little height from our bivouac. We spent the rest of the day confined to our tents by what was mercifully only a 24 hour storm.

The next day we set off for Rwadun Sar up a glorious Alpine type valley bivouacking that evening at 5,000 m. We reached the previously unclimbed summit (5,500 m) at 7.30 am the next day, having had a pleasant walk up the badly corniced NE. Ridge. We returned to base camp that afternoon.

The following day, we set off for our next objective - the SW Ridge of Zarsanic I, also unclimbed. We spent the night in an ablatian valley on the east side of the Shuwert Yah glacier. Next morning we crossed a side glacier and made heavy weather of steep moraine slopes leading to our next bivvi site below the SW Ridge of our objective. This ridge, although not difficult, proved to be much longer and further away than we had estimated. Despite this, we arrived at the summit (5,900 m) by 8.30 am the following morning to fantastic views of the whole Balkistan range of hills. We returned completely shattered to our bivvi site and after a brew, continued on down towards the Shuwert Yah glacier.

We decided it would be safer to cross the seracs below the side glacier the following morning and spent a hungry bivvi an hour away from where we had left food and supplies on the way up. We were met the next morning by our very relieved cook: He had come to meet us as pre-arranged, only to find us not there. We reached base camp that afternoon by a different route to the way up, crossing the Shuwert Yah glacier very high up to avoid the dangerous river crossing where the glacier reaches the area above Shuert. It had been very hot and the rivers were very full.

The next day we had to leave and we decided to return to Shimshal by the 'Yak Route' - this meant that the porters hired to carry out for us were able to use Yaks for this. Pru, who was suffering from bad knees, rode out in style for two days. This was a hard trip as on the second day two high passes had to be crossed, with a drop of 2,000 feet in between, but the porters were very happy as they were not carrying anything. The third day took us to Shimshal and two days later we were back in Pasu from where we took a jeep to Gilgit. We were fortunate that we had a jeep available for this part of the journey as rain had blocked several areas of the Karakoram Highway and ordinary buses and minibuses were unable to get through.

A 5 am start from the Hunza Tourist House got us to Pindi that night with 24 hours to spare before Saturday's plane. Our main disappointment was that the famous Juma market in Islamabad had been moved from a Friday to Sunday so the usual purchases of ear-rings and other souvenirs was foregone.

We felt that the expedition had been thoroughly worthwhile, satisfying and most enjoyable, with excellent weather on all but one day. We are extremely grateful to the M.E.F for their grant of £400. Many thanks.