

1998 SCOTTISH SAVOIA KANGRI EXPEDITION

EXPEDITION REPORT

EXPEDITION DATES

21 June - 27 August 1998

TEAM MEMBERS

Ruaridh Pringle (Age: 28) *Team Leader*

Paul Schweizer (Age: 42) *Treasurer*

Jamie Fisher (Age: 28) *Medical Officer*

Alan Swann (Age: 24) *Logistics Officer*

Jules Cartwright (Age: 24) *Climbing Member*

Nick Bullock (Age: 32) *Climbing Member*

Ewan Pringle (Age: 25) *Base Camp Support*

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of the 1998 Scottish Savoia Kangri Expedition was to climb **Savoia Kangri**: a virgin 7286m peak in the Baltoro area of the Greater Karakorum range in Pakistan, approximately 7km WSW of K2 on the border with China (see maps opposite and on page 2). The peak is continuously steep on all sides, but particularly on the southern and eastern sides. Most of the potentially easier routes are serac-threatened.



The peak had previously been attempted only once: in 1982, by a Czech/Swiss expedition (their account of the expedition in the American Alpine Journal is reproduced in the box below).

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THE AMERICAN ALPINE JOURNAL 1983

Savoia Kangri Attempt. Our expedition was composed of Jan Tichy, Jiri Ulrych, my brother Zdenek Lukes and me. All but my brother are Czechs in exile. We set up Base Camp on June 6 at the junction of the Godwin Austen and Savoia Glaciers at 16,400 feet. We had only 23 days left for the climb. From then until June 19 bad weather prevented our occupying Advance Base at 17,725 feet on the Savoia Glacier at the foot of Savoia Kangri I (7263 meters, 23,830 feet). The 6000-foot-high east face seemed best, as the rest of the mountain was avalanche-threatened. Without Ulrych, on June 20 we started up the prominent ridge. We were stopped on June 22 by strong winds and snowfall 2000-feet-up. On June 24 we came to where the ridge abutted the true face. The link was a very delicate, thin ice ridge. We just did not have enough time or equipment to cross this. We had reached 21,500 feet. After our descent, the weather deteriorated again, confirming we had made the right decision.

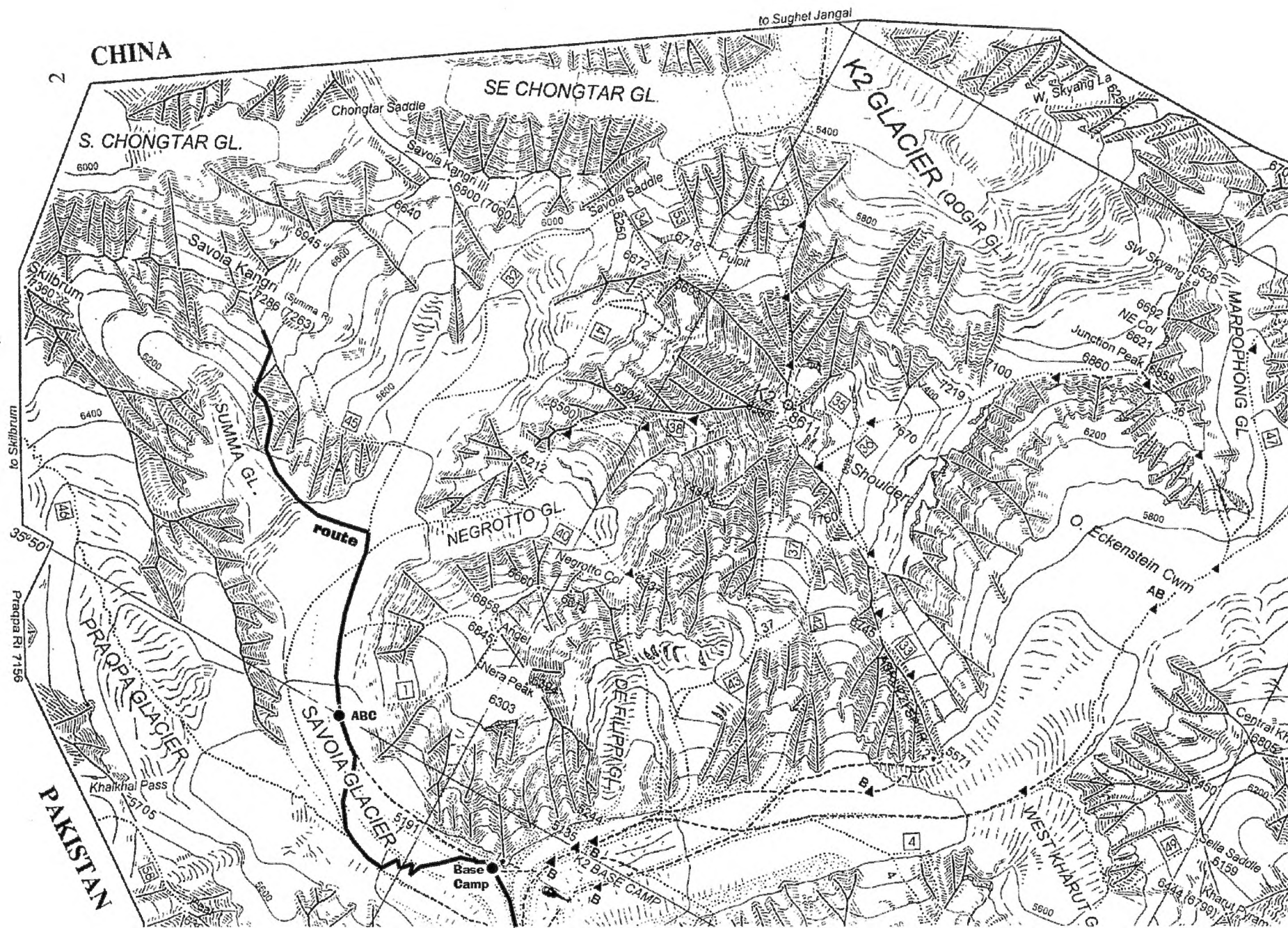
CESTMIR LUKES. *Czech living in Switzerland*

At the time of the expedition, Savoia Kangri was apparently one of the highest unclimbed independent peaks in the world.

ORGANISATION

Ruaridh began organisation and planning of the expedition in the summer of 1997. Once Savoia Kangri had been chosen as the objective, along with a likely-looking line (the central gully of the South East Face), various sponsors and grant awarding bodies were approached. Despite considerable expense and effort, attempts to attract financial backing through sponsorship proved unsuccessful. Significant funds however were raised through grant-awarding bodies and trusts, and considerable support achieved in the form of equipment offered at trade prices or below, gifted, or on loan (see page 10).

The team line-up changed considerably during planning. The expedition's first recruit, young



Map of K2 area showing location of Savoia Kangri and route taken

Scottish mountaineer Scott Muir, was forced to drop out in early 1998 on financial grounds. A replacement was found in Nick Bullock, whose addition necessitated costly last-minute updating of the Pakistan authorities. Well-known mountaineer Fabrizio Zangrilli, who joined the expedition in the March 1998, was forced to withdraw through frostbite sustained on an expedition to Cho Oyo, in which he summited successfully. This left three of the final 6 climbing members with a Scottish connection.

Paul Schweizer was appointed treasurer, Jamie Fisher as Medical Officer, and Alan Swann Transport Officer. Islamabad-based *Adventure Travel* were hired as the expedition's agents in Pakistan. Their function was to pre-organise expedition transport and accommodation, and smooth dealings with the Ministry of Tourism. This was felt to be important as only one team member had previously visited Pakistan. Their services proved extremely useful, but cost the expedition more than anticipated.

THE APPROACH

The expedition left Manchester airport on Sunday 21 June. No equipment was freighted to Pakistan in advance, and Pakistan International Airlines allowed members over 45Kg baggage each. We arrived in Islamabad on Monday 22. During the next two days we met our Liaison Officer, Captain Nasir Mahmood, and our cook, Goulam Rasool, and spent most of the expedition cash. Largely because of the efforts of Adventure Travel the expedition was able to leave Islamabad on Wednesday 24 June; arriving in Skardu on Thursday 25 June after a long and eventful journey on the Karakorum Highway. At Skardu, after completing the necessary paperwork, Ruairidh became ill with diarrhoea and fever, leaving the others to organise porters.

On Saturday 27 June, the team reached Askole after negotiating a landslide blocking the road



Ruairidh Pringle

before Thungol. The road seemed generally very dangerous (three local men supporting an Italian expedition to K2 had died several days previously when their jeep rolled down the hillside into the river). The team experienced a confrontation with an American expedition to K2 over the recent landslide which had blocked the road. The Americans recruited their porters in attempting to clear it while the landslide was still in progress, and insisted we helped. We refused (backed up by our staff), causing the American leader to become abusive and threaten us with the American climbing press. Equipment was eventually portered across the landslide, and jeeps hired on the other side for the final part of the trip to Askole.

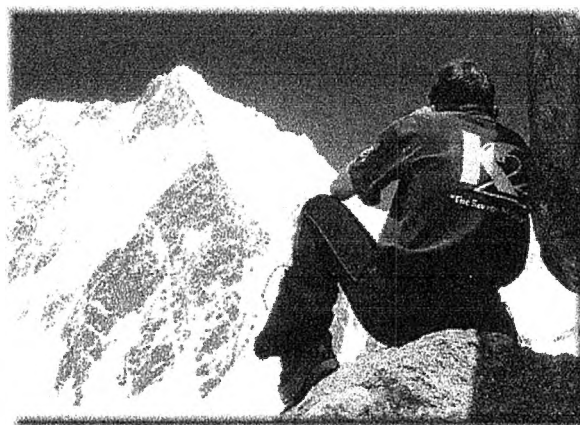
The walk-in began on Sunday 28. At the end of the first day, a porter was sent back with an injured ankle. The 'flying fox' bridge we queued laboriously on was replaced by a

bridge later in the month. Some scrambling involved in the trek must have been very tricky with the porters' 25Kg loads. Ruaridh was ill for most of the walk-in with stomach complaints and a chest infection, and Alan suffered vomiting, weakness and other symptoms seeming to be altitude sickness, complicated by the difficulties of regulating his diabetes at altitude. Mainly because of this, a rest day was taken at Urdokas. Jules and Nick also suffered sporadic stomach complaints. Pit toilets were provided at many camps, but the porters seemed to ignore these; often defecating very close to streams. Our Sirdar Hussain and Guide Mohammed Ali did a superb job, although the team did not relish the 6am starts.

THE PEAK

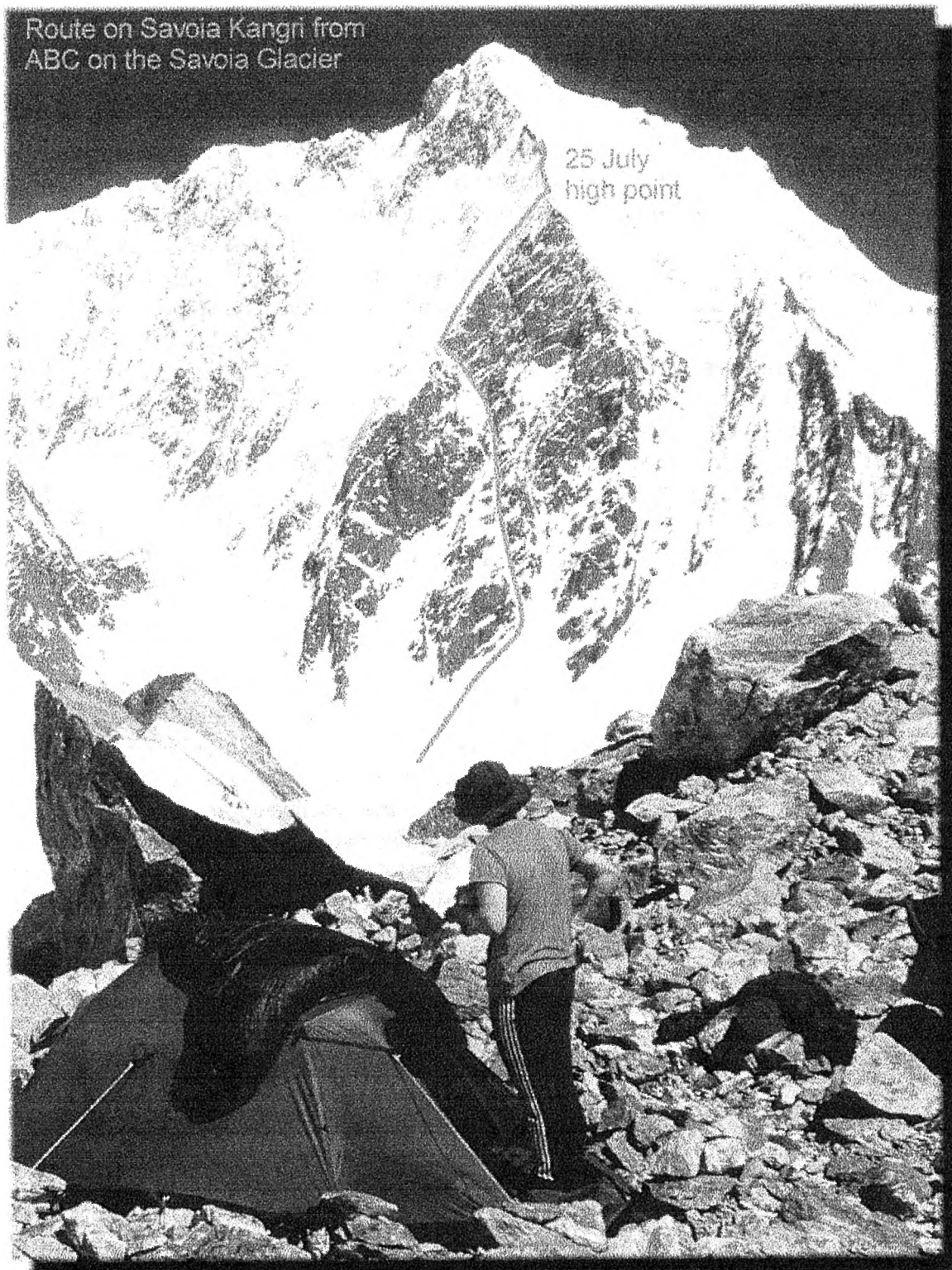
On Sunday 5 July the expedition established base-camp at the junction of the Savoia and Godwin-Austen Glaciers below the Gilkey memorial and K2. There were concerns about a serac high on Angel Peak above the site, but our sirdar and guide assured us the site was protected by a rock ridge above the Gilkey memorial, and therefore safe. On Monday 6 July, Jamie, Jules and Paul established Advance Base Camp on the Savoia Glacier below Angel Peak at around 5300m. The site was 1km above that of the Japanese camp destroyed by serac fall in 1997. The Japanese camp had been placed at the foot of a gully directly below impending seracs on Angel Peak. Later in the expedition, Ewan, Alan and Ruaridh watched an avalanche descend the same gully; the resulting debris cloud crossing the Savoia Glacier. In deep snow, the approach took 4 hours: a time later reduced to under 2 hours.

The rest of the team followed on Tuesday 7; all returning but Jamie and Jules, who remained to acclimatise, attempting two climbs above the camp. Bamboo wands were used on the heavily crevassed glacier to aid navigation. Paul and Nick returned to ABC on Wednesday 8 July, climbing to just below the Savoia Col for acclimatisation. Jamie Fisher and Jules Cartwright returned to Base Camp on Friday 10, Paul and Nick on Saturday 11.



Ruaridh Pringle

Ruaridh, Ewan and Alan returned to ABC on Monday 13 July in fine weather, and the others on Tuesday 14. By this time, the camp had been stocked with food, which was stored in barrels. Scrutiny of the SE Face of Savoia Kangri had confirmed our original intentions to attempt the triangular rock-buttress of the lower face well to the left of the line attempted by the Czechs in 1983, following the bow-shaped leftwards-slanting central gully. The gully led to a probable tent site below a large ice face we hoped to climb by the objectively safe right edge. This face led to a steep mixed ridge rising from approximately 6900m to the summit at 7286m. The route was 2000m in length. It was decided that the best approach was to climb it in pure lightweight Alpine style, carrying a minimal rack, and abseiling back down the route of ascent.



On the evening of 15 July, Paul, Nick, Jules and Jamie approached the foot of Savoia Kangri's SE face, climbing with one 60 metre rope per pair with a view to combining them for the descent. They climbed the face's obvious snow couloir in the dark, reaching a prominent snow arête two thirds of the way up the gully where, with sunlight full on the face, stonefall forced a bivouac. That evening (16 July), Alan and Ruaridh also set off up the face in good weather, but during the night thickening clouds replaced a clear sky. Worsening weather with persistent snowfall and rising temperatures during the morning forced everyone to retreat. Jamie Fisher was hit by a stone, and Ruaridh Pringle and Alan Swann by blocks of ice. Fractures to arms and legs were initially suspected, but there were no lasting injuries. Food and gas were left at the high point (around 6000m), and Paul, Nick, Jamie and Jules descended the rock of the lower face by abseil (mainly slings on good spikes).

With Ewan minding Base Camp, the 6 climbing members returned to ABC on Monday 20 July for another attempt. With the face in better condition Jamie, Jules, Paul and Nick climbed through the night; Jamie and Jules reaching a flat area where the gully met the ice face after 12 hours of sustained Grade 3/4 climbing. Here they were able to pitch their tent. Paul and Nick suffered rock-fall in the upper gully, forcing a retreat to the bivvy site of the previous attempt, where they spent the night. Next day Jamie and Jules climbed the ice face (700m) in 11 hours, reaching a perfect campsite below a gendarme marking the start of the summit ridge at around 6900 m. The face was objectively safe ice and snow at 55-60°.



Ruaridh Pringle

During daylight hours of 23 July the weather deteriorated and both teams were confined to their tents for two days, during which 0.7m of snow fell. On the morning of the 25 July, Jamie and Jules made a summit bid, leaving most of their gear at the camp. They reached approximately 7000m before turning back because of deep, unstable snow. The following day the weather deteriorated again. With no food left, Jules and Nick retreated down the ice face, joining Nick and Paul for a long retreat in rapidly worsening weather. All four reached ABC safely late in the evening of Sunday 26 July. Ruaridh and Alan meanwhile had also climbed to a height of around 6800m, enjoying some exposed and varied climbing before

persistently unstable weather and treacherous powder snow forced them to retreat through a blizzard. Abseiling from retrievable ice-screws, they reached ABC around 6 hours ahead of the others.

As the team returned to base camp, a spell of bad weather set in, with days of snow and even rain. On Friday 31 July, Ruaridh, Ewan and Alan left the expedition. Captain Nasir Mahmood accepted the deputisation of leadership to Jamie, and porters were requested from Concordia. The three made the trek out along with five porters, carrying expedition equipment no longer needed, via the 5600m pass of the Gondogoro La; reaching Hushe in 3 days. Near Hushe, Ruaridh and Ewan climbed a probably unclimbed 300+m route on the prominent central ridge of Urdar Peak, at around VS 5a. They then stayed for three days

around Skardu, leaving Pakistan on 11 August. Alan trekked in the Masherbrum area then went travelling before flying back to Britain on 27 August.

The remaining four members left ABC on 5 August during an apparent improvement in the weather. Good névé in the gully enabled both teams to climb half of it moving together, reaching the start of the ice face during the morning of the 6 August. On the morning of 7 August Jamie and Jules began the face 1 hour before Nick and Paul. Good snow and ice conditions allowed them to halve their previous time, reaching the top camp at midday. Paul and Nick, experiencing deteriorating snow in the afternoon sun, reached the high camp at 7 pm. Despite a perfect evening the weather broke during the night and after a couple of brief attempts all four were confined to tents until the 10 August.

By this time they had run out of food, and their condition was deteriorating. The four descended without incident leaving snow stakes, ice screws and slings as abseil points. Despite the stormy weather, Jamie, Jules and Nick developed snow blindness at ABC, and struggled to reach base camp - aided considerably by amethocaine eye drops. Despite not wearing sun-protective glasses, Paul escaped eye trouble.

DEPARTURE

The days leading to the remaining team's departure on 15 August were spent cleaning up camps, burning combustibles and carrying all other rubbish to base camp. Remaining team members took 4 days to reach the jeep track terminus at Hushe via the Gondogoro-La, hiring 15 porters for the walk-out. Two days were spent in Skardu and a couple of further days in Islamabad, where Jamie attended an apparently traumatic debriefing at the Ministry of Tourism. They were joined by Alan, and flew back to Manchester on 27 August.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

During the walk-in, it proved impossible to prevent porters burning firewood. We were assured that no live wood was being used; only dead wood, but this did not appear to be the case. It also proved extremely difficult to get porters to use pit toilets provided. Both the L.O. and our sirdar seemed to just accept the status quo, and were not keen to help us change it.

These two factors caused concern at the environmental deterioration particularly around campsites like Paiju, and the lack of attention being given to environmental concerns as use of these places from trekking groups and expeditions increases. All campsites on the route were covered in human waste, which could be found in and around the water supplies. This is surely not a sustainable situation, and some effective way of addressing it seems to be urgently needed.

At base camp a simple drop-toilet was set up above a crevasse on the glacier.

All combustible waste from the expedition was burned at ABC and base camp. A porter was hired to carry out all incombustible rubbish (the expedition's size meant there was not very much) to Hushe, from where it was removed to Skardu.



Garbage on the Savoia Glacier (R. Pringle)

The horrifying amount of refuse left by previous expeditions, particularly around the ABC area below Angel Peak, made any serious clean-up attempt of the area seem futile without dedicated resources. The moraine around ABC was littered with countless tins, stoves, batteries, corrugated plastic packing panels, gas cylinders, plastic and metal drums and even a metal bath tub: probably mostly left by expeditions to the West side of K2. As the glacier's surface gradually melted, more and more garbage was revealed. Some of the refuse surrounding ABC was tidied into heaps, but the team was totally unequipped for a clean up of the magnitude required. By the look of it, making significant inroads might require a military-scale operation.

EXPEDITION ACCOUNTS

Ruaridh's original expedition budget proved a reasonable estimation. Savings were made in some areas, but hidden costs in Pakistan were underestimated.

EXPENSES		Amount
7 X Peak Permits	£	1,500.00
Pakistan International Airlines Air Tickets	£	3,577.00
Telephone/Fax bills	£	270.00
Transport in UK	£	80.00
Expedition Equipment bought in UK	£	200.00
Stationery/Postage/Photocopying	£	190.00
Gas canister purchase	£	240.00
7 X Visas	£	280.00
Expedition agent services, vehicle hire	£	2,500.00
Environmental bond (non-refundable)	£	125.00
Cash Payment to Cook	£	150.00
Cash payment to L.O.	£	615.00
Porter hire	£	2,500.00
Miscellaneous (including porter equipment, food and insurance; sirdars, team food, kerosene, barrels, sirdars, hotels, restaurants, rental of kitchen tent and mess tent, purchase of stoves)	£	3,650.00
TOTAL	£	15,877.00

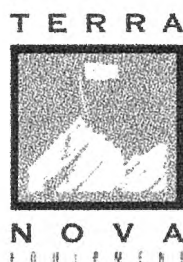
CONTRIBUTIONS		Amount
Mountaineering Council of Scotland grant	£	900.00
Mount Everest Foundation grant	£	900.00
British Mountaineering Council grant	£	750.00
Scottish Mountaineering Trust grant	£	500.00
Liam Elliot Memorial Trust grant	£	300.00
7 X Personal contributions		£12,527.00
TOTAL	£	15,877.00

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks are due to the following for their very generous financial support, without which the expedition would not have been possible:

The Mount Everest Foundation
The Mountaineering Council of Scotland
The British Mountaineering Council
The Scottish Mountaineering Club
The Liam Elliot Memorial Trust

The team are also indebted to the following sponsors:



Terra Nova Equipment Ltd, for the loan of six superb tents, plus several items of 'Extremities' clothing.

Mountain King, for kitting the expedition out with their top-quality walking poles



High Places, for the generous supply of rugged Edelweiss ropes and Simond climbing hardware at sub-trade prices.

Vango Ltd for the loan of a very comfortable Base Camp tent



Thanks also to **Lyon Equipment**, for supplying a **Marmot** high-altitude tent at trade price, and **Outside** for the supply of snow-stakes at reduced rates.

For advice and general assistance, many thanks are also due to:

Andy McNae, David Hamilton, Hamish Irvine, Fabrizio Zangrilli and Marion Lawrence of PIA. Thanks also to others who helped in ways large and small.