

Mount Everest Foundation

British/New Zealand Expedition to
Beka Brakkai Chhok (6940m),
June/July 2008

Malcolm Bass
Patricia Deavoll

Overall aim

The objective of this expedition was to make the first ascent of Beka Brakkai Chhok (BBC), a 6940m peak in the Batura massif of northern Pakistan, via the south face.



The South Face of Beka Brakkai Chhok

Summary

The expedition members were Malcolm Bass (UK) and Pat Deavoll (NZ). We arrived in Pakistan on the 2nd of June. After completing formalities in Islamabad we travelled by jeep up the Karakoram Highway reaching the road head at Bar on the 6th of June. We began the walk in on the 7th June and set up Base Camp on the 9th June.

We acclimatised on Baktoshi peak (6050m). On the 22nd July we began our attempt on Beka Brakkai Chhok (BBC). We climbed for three and a half days up moderate snow and ice, interspersed with short, steep ice steps, to a camp site at 6000m just below the col on the South West ridge of BBC.

The next day (26th June) we started at 3.00am for the summit. After we had been climbing for two hours thick clouds moved in and it began to snow, so we abseiled back to our tent.

A long and tedious period of bad weather followed with thick cloud, snow, and electrical storms. We eked out our eight days of rations to ten days as we were determined to wait out the weather and go for the summit. On the night of 31st June the weather finally cleared allowing us to begin climbing the next day, our eleventh on the mountain. We climbed a slanting line up to the south west ridge which we reached at about 6300m. The largely horizontal ridge was initially broad, but it soon began to narrow, and we were stopped by a long, sharp, corniced section composed of suspect snow. We considered its traverse to be unjustifiably dangerous given that the snow was too poor for building belays. We retreated from this point, bivouacking once on the descent, and reached Base Camp on the 2nd of July.

Our porters arrived on the 6th of July and we reached the road at Bar on the 7th July. After an overnight visit to Karrimabad we drove back to Gilgit and from there flew to Islamabad. We left Pakistan on the 11th of July.

The South Peak of BBC (the peak we were aiming for) was climbed in early August of the same year by Italians Simone More and Herve Barmasse using the same route that we had attempted. There is now some doubt as to which peak on the BBC ridge is the highest point.

Purpose

The expedition's aim was to attempt the first ascent of BBC via the South Face.

Location

BBC (grid reference 36 32 50N, 74 25 15E) is located in the Batura massif, a sub-range of the Karakoram mountains in the Gilgit district of the Northern Areas of Pakistan, west of the Hunza valley. The Batura massif is the westernmost sub-range of the Karakoram; it runs from Chalt village, in Bar valley on the east, to Kampir Dior in the Kurumbar valley. This valley separates the Pamir and Hindu Kush ranges from the Karakoram. The highest peak in the range is Batura Sar (7795m). BBC lies on the western side of the cirque that encloses the head of the Baltar glacier. The western flank of BBC drops to the head of the Toltar glacier and its northern flank to the Batura glacier. The name Beka Brakkai Chhok is not familiar to the locals, but we couldn't establish any local name for the peak.

Character and Access

BBC lies at the head of the Baltar Glacier, three or four (porter speed) days walk from the road end at the village of Bar. The first day's walking is on a good track along the banks of the Baltar River. On the second day the route crosses the snout of the Baltar Glacier to the shepherd camp at Baltar Meadows. The next day or day and a half walk to base camp is either on moraine or alongside the glacier. At no stage is the walking difficult.

Traditionally the porters like to camp overnight between Baltar Meadows and base camp, but we are able to persuade them to make the carry from the Meadows to base camp in one day for the cost of a goat bought from the shepherds at Baltar Meadows.

Base camp is situated at 4135m on a small 'oasis' at the junction of the south and north Baltar Glaciers. It has a small lake and a spring running out of a scree slope for water. It is an ideal spot for a base camp being sited on grass and next to a small shallow lake for bathing.

The route we took from BC to the mountain ran along the eastern edge of the northern lobe of the Baltar glacier until opposite the icefall descending from BBC's south west ridge. We then went straight across the glacier. The eastern edge of the glacier is fairly crevassed and requires some weaving around to find a way across.



Crossing the Baltar Glacier to access the foot of the face

Research

This expedition was lucky enough to benefit from Pat Deavoll's prior experience derived from her 2007 trip to BBC with Lydia Bradley so no new research was required.

Formalities

There are some strict formalities required to climb in Pakistan. All peaks below 6,500m are free from any peak fee, however climbing activity on mountains higher than 6,500m requires a climbing permit from the Pakistan Ministry of Tourism. As a result of the decline in the number of expeditions travelling to Pakistan in recent years the Ministry has been offering very large discounts on peak fees, up to 95% in winter.

We enlisted the services of Nazir Sabir Expeditions (NSE) to organize our permit, transport, porters and base camp staff and facilities. NSE also supplied us with propane/butane gas cylinders. We recommend future expeditions to Pakistan to enlist the help of NSE or similar. A meeting with the Alpine Club of Pakistan in Islamabad prior to leaving for the trip, and on return, is mandatory. With the assistance of NSE the impact of the formalities on our trip was negligible.

Trip log

June 2nd. Malcolm arrived in Islamabad in the morning. In the afternoon there was a suicide bomb attack on the Danish Embassy with 18 fatalities. Pat arrived in the late evening

June 3rd. Met our excellent NSE guide Shukur Ullah Baig. Briefing at Alpine Club. Dinner with Nazir Sabir.

June 4th. By jeep to Besham.

June 5th. Amazing day's driving up Indus valley. Very hot arid scenery with vivid green oases where the land is irrigated. Views of Nanga Parbat.

June 6th. Drove from Gilgit up to the road head at Bar. Met our cook Javed. Camped between small terraced fields near the village attracting considerable local interest. Multitudes of people arrived hoping to act as porters. Baig and his NSE colleagues involved in long and involved negotiations about numbers, wages, and stages.

June 7th. A short day's walking along rough tracks along the east bank of the Bar Nala. Deliberate delays by porters meant we made camp at our lunch stop just east of the junction between the outflow streams of the Baltar and Kukuar glaciers. The porters had brought more men than agreed and demanded wages for them, as well as increased daily wages. Baig and his NSE colleagues contained all this admirably, so Pat and I were untroubled, but the endless "stings" required Baig to be constantly vigilant, causing him considerable stress. With dinner we enjoyed Hunza mulberry wine supplied by people who will remain nameless.

June 8th. Up the snout of the Baltar glacier, then across the glacier to the north bank and steeply up to a surprisingly flat, grassy area scattered with small trees; Baltar meadows. There is a seasonal settlement of shepherds n goat herders here who played a vigorous form of polo (on foot). This is a beautiful spot with fine views of Hachinder Sar to the east. The porters demanded we buy them a goat. We said we would if they made the carry to BC in one day rather than their usual two. They accepted the deal.

June 9th . Along the north edge of the Baltar glacier and then across it in a north easterly direction to our base camp site beneath Har Chishh. The porters made it by early afternoon leaving time for them to return to Baltar meadows and enjoy their goat. Malcolm meanwhile was enjoying nothing as he was struck by some evil gut complaint

June 10 to June 13 Acclimatization days. Swimming in the shallow, almost warm, base camp lake. Scrambling on Har Chishh ridges. Walked up Baltar towards BBC and scoped a line on the icefall/face to the south west of the rib of Pat and Lydia Bradley's 2007 attempt.

June 14 to June 19. Acclimatization on Baktoshi peak. Spent 1 night at 4500m and 3 nights at 5000m. This peak is an ideal acclimatization venue, close to BC and with good campsites in the apparently safe ice fall.

June 20 and 21. Rest days and packing for BBC

June 22. (Day 1). Left BC to climb BBC with 8 days scant rations and ten days gas. Followed east side of glacier till nearly opposite BBC then crossed glacier and got onto a grassy ridge on the southern side of the southernmost icefall dropping from the south side of BBC (see photo with route imposed). Up this ridge, then onto icefall and across on terraces to a good camp site on a terrace.

June 23. (Day 2). Made a rising traverse up the lower icefall to reach a basin below the snout of the upper icefall/face. Moved round to a gully on the north side of the upper icefall and started up this un-roped with some sections of polished black ice requiring care. (This gully is menaced by the huge serac high on the south face of BBC. On our descent we saw a serac fall send an enormous avalanche down this gully, so big that it spilled out onto the icefall covering our camp 2 site. Luckily we were still at our camp 3 site). As we climbed it began to snow and conscious of how much ground the gully drained we made a hasty exit up and left onto the icefall proper where we camped. (This was the site later pummeled by serac fall).



The gully on day 2

June 24 (Day3) Climbed up the middle of the icefall/face. Several roped pitches up steeper sections. Camped on the left side of the icefall/face.

June 25 (Day4) A short day to a camp just below the ridge at about 6000m

June 26 (Day5) Ready to leave at 3.00 am for summit, but plummeting pressure and high, thin cloud stream decided us against it. With hindsight this was a bad decision as the day turned out fine.

June 27 (Day6) Left at 3.00 am without bivouac equipment with the aim of reaching the summit. Climbed up and right towards the ridge as it rose towards the summit. After 2 hours it began to snow heavily so we retreated to the tent. It continued to snow all day.

June 28 to June31st (Days 7 to 10). A frustrating period of poor weather with regular snow fall, a couple of electrical storms, and heavy cloud. We hung on, stretching our eight days rations.

July 1st (Day 11) The weather cleared on the afternoon of Day 10. We left the tent at 1.00am and climbed to the SW ridge, reaching it at dawn. We moved along the ridge until we reached a sharp and heavily corniced section. The snow was unconsolidated and there was no ice, so it wasn't possible to make belays. We felt that the passage of this section, which looked to be at least 6 pitches long, was unjustifiable for us. So, with great sadness, we began to retreat. We stopped for a brew while we packed up the tent and continued down with a mixture of down climbing and abseiling off V threads. Late that afternoon the immense serac below the summit ridge discharged an mighty avalanche down the gully we had used on Day 2. Luckily we had camped whilst still fairly high on the icefall/face as we were concerned by the warm afternoon temperatures. By now our rations were non existent.

On the South West Ridge just below the high point



July 2nd (Day 12) Completed descent to glacier and plodded back to base camp.

July 6,7 Porters arrived on the 6th and we walked out over 2 days, camping at Baltar meadows on the way.

July 9 De-brief with Alpine Club in Islamabad.

July 11 Both members left Pakistan



South Face route and camps

Finances

Income

Mount Everest Foundation Grant: £2250

British Mountaineering Council Grant: £750

Shipton Tilman Grant £2500

Personal contributions: £2000

Total £7,500

Expenditure

Services supplied by Nazir Sabir Expeditions (permits, travel, food, gas porters, cook, base camp equipment, liaison officer, accommodation) £5750

Flights: £1200

Insurance: £400

Medical supplies: £150

Total: £7, 500

Conclusion

We had a fascinating trip to a beautiful area. We worked hard on the mountain, staying high with minimal rations for many days, so were disappointed not to reach the summit.

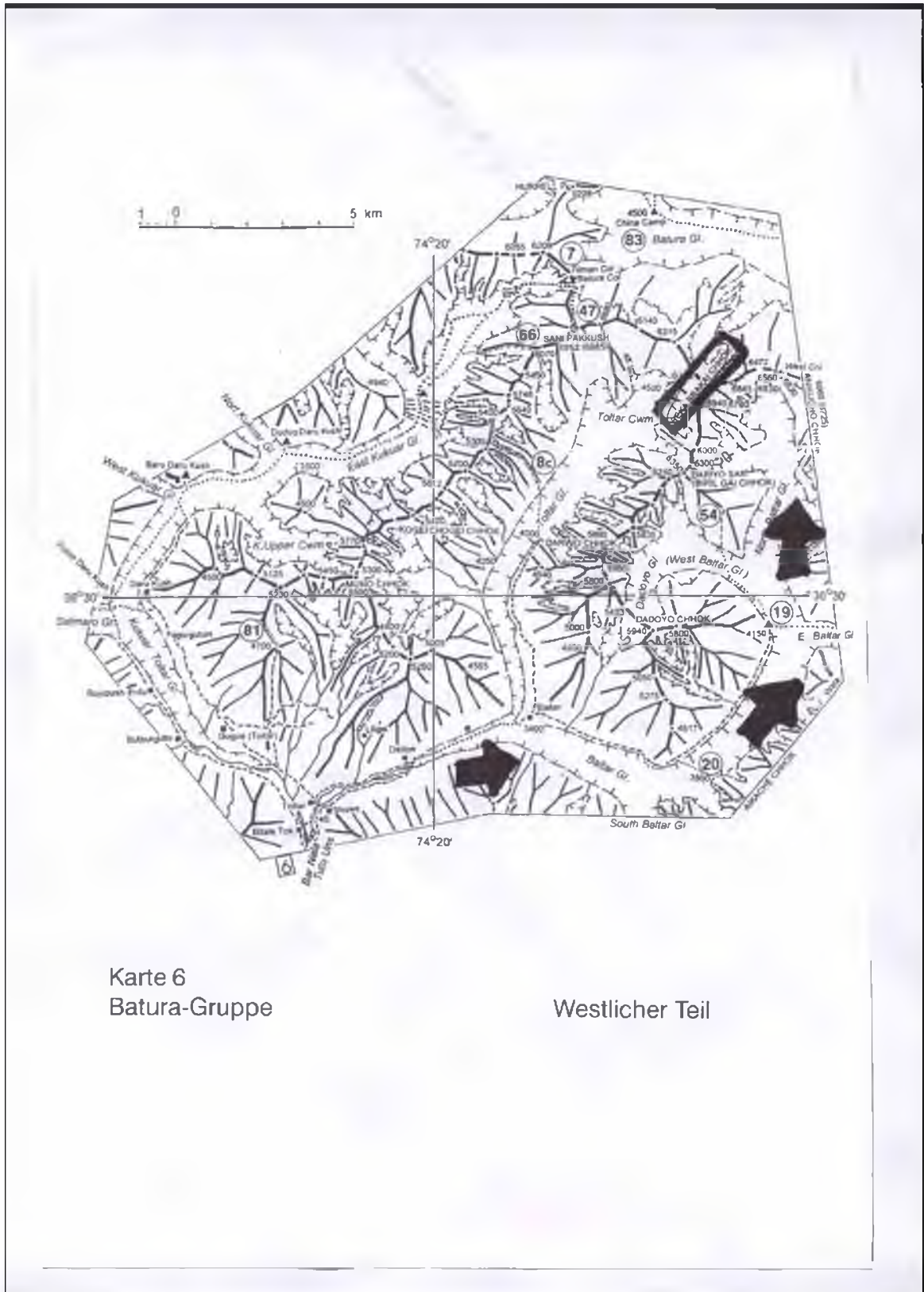
Further topographical work is required to establish which peak on the BBC ridge is the highest. Our view from the ridge dividing the upper Toltar and Baltar glaciers showed potential for impressive hard climbs on the North West faces of BBC and Dariyo Sar which could perhaps be accessed from the upper Toltar. Hard new routes up complex ridge systems could also be made on to peaks on the Hachinder Chhish ridge line from the Baltar glacier below our base camp site.

Porters continue to be a problem in this area, so we would advise the use of an experienced agent.

Acknowledgements

The expedition gratefully acknowledges assistance from the following organizations:

- The Mount Everest Foundation.
- The British Mountaineering Council
- Shipton Tilman Award/ WL Gore
- Mountain Hardware
- Black Diamond and Southern Approach.
- Icebreaker New Zealand.
- DHL
- Outside Sports Queenstown.
- Back Country Foods.
- Heinz Watties Ltd.



Karte 6
Batura-Gruppe

Westlicher Teil